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THE RING

UNAVOIDABLE

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EL MONSTRUO

THRILLA IN MANILA TURNS 50

BRIAN NORMAN JR. TARGETS HANEY

ABDULLAH MASON'S ACID TEST

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OPENING SHOTS

Former junior lightweight titleholder Joseph "JoJo" Diaz (left) has been losing more than he's been winning in recent years, but that doesn't mean his fights aren't fun to watch. Diaz eventually dropped a unanimous decision to Regis Prograis in Chicago, but he put forth a spirited effort in overcoming a serious eye cut and shook up the former two-time titleholder (at 140 pounds) more than once.

Cris Esqueda/Golden Boy

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Bringing Data to Duels: How Wearable Tech is Transforming Boxing

Ready to rethink how you train to box?
Forget meticulously planning training sessions, agonizing over injuries, and wishing you could predict the unpredictable. Today, wearable health technologies are available to transform your boxing skills.

Advancements in the healthcare sector have built solutions that allow you to train like your favorite players, predict (and prevent) injuries, and meet your boxing goals. By integrating wearable technology, boxers can transgress beyond their fitness roadblocks and get to the next level of precision, focus, and precision with every punch. And stc is supporting that transformation.

With a range of investments in Saudi Arabia's healthcare sector, and constant efforts to develop advanced IoT technologies, stc is utilizing its advanced digital infrastructure to power innovative healthcare solutions – including the wearable technology that will revolutionize training, in and out of the ring. This transformation has the power to redefine the way athletes can engage with the world of boxing –and here's how.

From Sweat to Stats
Wearable technology can target areas of improvement across the key attributes that are essential to any boxing player, one of which is strength. Punch power feedback monitors offer a new, data-driven way of monitoring the strength of each strike. Wearable motion sensors have also been used to provide real-time insights into muscle activation and movement patterns, correcting lifting form in real time. With wearable tech, every punch becomes an opportunity for smarter and stronger performance.

Alongside strength training, boxers demand speed and agility. Wearable technology can now analyze footwork rhythm and pivot speed, giving users direct insight into areas of improvement. Heart rate monitoring offers valuable insights into how the body naturally responds to physical activity and movement. Together, these tools offer comprehensive data that can elevate agility training.

Perhaps most importantly, wearable tech helps to avoid overtraining and injury. Movement monitors can intervene in solo-training sessions to prevent injury-prone form, and the analytics collected over a course of training sessions can flag periods of physical fatigue. Studies on elite athletes have revealed a 20% improvement in recovery time and a 15% boost in workout efficiency when using performance-monitoring devices. This data-driven approach to sports empowers boxers to train smarter, not harder, reducing risks and increasing efficiency to reach peak performance.

Systems Behind the Screens: stc's Role in Innovating Health Tech
A wearable device is only as powerful as the digital ecosystem supporting it – the networks, data platforms, and analytical tools that make data useful. As Saudi Arabia's leading digital innovator and tech provider, stc is enhancing its digital infrastructure to revolutionize people's health and wellbeing across the Kingdom.

Acting as a backbone to these healthcare solutions is stc's advanced 5G network and secure IoT technologies. stc has connected biometric sensors and devices to the cloud, enabled secure real-time collection, transmission, and analysis of vast amounts of data across the healthcare system. Together, these systems allow for the secure storage and processing of personal health data and analytics to be shared across devices, allowing the information from your wearables to flow instantly to your trainer's tablet. stc's secure cloud stores and processes years of health data to identify long-term trends, ensuring that you can continue to work on improving your health and fitness goals – and see results that make or break a match in the ring.

Beyond creating the systems that allow these innovations in health and fitness to flourish, stc has also leveraged AI and machine learning tools to create new technologies that can optimize athletic performance. This technology can classify punches, analyze movement efficiency, and predict injuries by detecting subtle biomechanical changes. From training data to performance predictions, stc's extensive digital toolkit is readily available to power the next generation of sports science.

Wearable technologies, fueled by advancements in digital infrastructure, have the capacity to change the game for boxers. As stc continues to lead the Kingdom by developing the digital backbone for these innovations, the line between athlete and analyst blurs, offering everyone the chance to engage with the science behind each swing.

COME OUT WRITING

Fans believe the big-punching Anthony Yarde (right) will test David Benavidez.

DAVID BENAVIDEZ VS. ANTHONY YARDE

Benavidez overwhelms opponents with pressure and output, but Yarde is physically strong and explosive enough to change a fight instantly. If Yarde can land sharp counters while staying disciplined, he has a chance to surprise people. Still, over 12 rounds, Benavidez's relentless pace likely breaks him down for a late stoppage or wide decision.

Coach Malik

Benavidez vs. Yarde is great matchmaking. Two styles that will most likely gel beautifully for a Fight of the Year candidate. It is also arguably Benavidez's biggest and first real test at light heavyweight. It's a great fight to take if he wants Beterbiev or Dmitry Bivol in the future.

Johan Verdugo

This is a brutal, high-stakes fight. Benavidez's relentless pressure, punch volume and conditioning made him one of the most feared at super middleweight. Yarde is explosive and dangerous early, but his stamina has been questionable. If Yarde can't stop Benavidez within the first half, the momentum swings heavily to Benavidez.

Ben Chandler

Sure, we wanted Canelo vs. Benavidez (but Canelo vs. Crawford – not a bad substitution!). Yes, we dabbled with Benavidez vs. Bivol (those sparring stories – phew!). And in the U.K.? Of course we wanted Yarde vs. Buatsi (and maybe we will still get it). But this? This is the feature we didn't know we needed. This matchup feels like "Praise the Lord (Da Shine)" by A$AP Rocky & Skepta: A U.S.-U.K. linkup, a chaotic clash of styles and culture delivering undeniable rhythm, volume and violence.

Benavidez, the "Mexican Monster" with Ecuadorian blood ... boxing's pressure god ... fast hands. Vicious combinations. A gas tank that doesn't quit. Bank on him getting tired? Good luck. *Benavidez voices*: "I came, I saw, I came, I saw ..." He doesn't wait – he walks you down. And right now, Benavidez might be screaming: "I run the game, you just practice."

But Yarde? A real Yard[e] man raised in East London, powered by Jamaican roots, might just grin and say: "Yeah ... and I heard practice makes perfect." *winks* This is his third world title shot. He's been close. He's been counted out. But he "came from the dirt" and "can't go back." He's not just here for the feature – he's here to flip the whole track. And when it's all said and done? It could be: Third time's a charm!

We might all just end up praising the Lord for this matchup (we didn't know we needed).

Niambi "Bambi" Bridge

BRIAN NORMAN JR. VS. DEVIN HANEY

Haney, one of the most underrated fighters, undisputed at 135 pounds, 140-pound titleholder, chasing another title against Norman at 147. Despite his accolades, this fight could be dangerous for Haney. He was hurt many times in his "no contest" bout with Ryan Garcia, and some attributed this to Garcia's left hook and power – both of which Norman has in his artillery. Could the "no running" pressure Haney to enter a firefight?

Billy Koseda

Norman by TKO or SD – Haney has a glass chin and his father is annoying. He's a great boxer besides that chin! It will be his kryptonite.

Andrew Trumpold

In a time where fights like Tank-Paul are being made, we have to salute guys like David Benavidez, Anthony Yarde, Devin Haney and Brian Norman Jr. It's fighters like these guys that make people fall in love with the sport.

I. Joaquin Vela

Haney vs. Norman feels like experience versus hunger. Haney is calm, surgical and composed, but Norman is fearless and relentless. That fight will test Haney's maturity more than his skills. These fights aren't just matchups – they're proof that boxing is alive, unpredictable and unstoppable.

Omotayo Ridwan

Haney vs. Norman is an excellent clash of styles.

Haney's technical mastery meets Norman Jr.'s raw power. Haney has the edge in experience and ring IQ, but Norman's explosiveness and confidence make him dangerous. If Haney can avoid big shots and control the pace, he wins on points. If not, Norman could score a career-defining KO.

Trey

GIVE UP HOPE (IN A GOOD WAY)

In the July 2025 issue of The Ring, Thomas Gerbasi used the term "Great American Hope." You would think that there are not any good American boxers today. A quick look at The Ring ratings shows that is not the case. There are two American Ring champions. There are 19 different alphabet titleholders from the U.S. It is true that from light heavyweight to heavyweight there are no American champions and only one rated fighter.

When I first started reading The Ring in July 1971, Americans held only the light heavyweight and heavyweight titles. Most of the other titles were held by Asians, Latin Americans and a few Europeans. It was not until the late 1970s that more Americans won titles in the lower weights. It seems that if an American is not the heavyweight champion, the crown means nothing. Get real.

The idea that America does not have a heavyweight champion or top contenders due to the NFL, NBA and MLB is bogus. The truth is that other nations have better heavyweight boxers. From the end of WWII until the fall of the USSR, boxers from Eastern Europe and those from the Soviet Union could not go pro. Same with those from Cuba (unless they defected) and China.

America has many good boxers. There is no need for a Great American Hope.

Walter Zabicki

DON'T FORGET THE LITTLE GUYS

The Ring has been putting on amazing cards lately. With that being said, I think small tournaments with fights being scheduled would really make the sport more exciting, as it also gives a road map for the fighters who lose to be in great matchups as well.

Armaan Shaikh

A fighter's chosen name is as important as the career that makes the name resonate throughout the world when spoken. The likes of The Raging Bull, Sweet Pea, Sugar, Hitman, Gypsy King, GWOAT and The Greatest can not only create a persona but can also become a huge financial revenue stream to help ensure a secure future for the fighter and their family.

Some boxers are never lucky enough to be given sound advice, and sometimes the best advice costs nothing at all. To any young, up-and-coming professional boxers: Take a lesson from these historic names, guard it, trademark it and market it. Build a brand with it. And create a name that inspires yourself and others – that will drive you to greatness.

N. Sharpe

I've always found the criticism of fighters who "quit" to be extremely harsh and unfair. After all, they are the ones risking their lives (for our entertainment), while we are merely the ones watching. So I ask this to everyone reading: Who are we, the viewers, to judge a boxer for making such a decision?

It constantly surprises me that I am of the minority opinion. We know how dangerous boxing is and always will be due to its inherent nature. If the recent set of tragedies in Japan reinforced anything to me, it's that boxing fans will mourn our departed warriors, yet also be so quick to berate those who prioritize their health and well-being just because we feel cheated out of a proper spectacle.

In a sport where one punch is so often the difference between life and death, why do we have any right? Is Roberto Duran remembered as a "quitter" or as one of the greatest fighters who ever was? How can we criticize those who choose to live in a world where so many die? When all is said and done, maybe we are the ones who should quit being so callous in our judgments.

Raven Aussie

One concept unanimously agreed upon by boxing enthusiasts is the restoration of the one-belt era; only one champion per division can be recognized. As an aficionado myself, naturally I'm a strong proponent of the Ring Magazine belt, the only title that matters, being the official and sole, hard-earned championship symbol proudly crowning a deserving warrior in their respective class/classes. Rendering all other sanctioning bodies (and their fees) obsolete.

My "letter to Santa" would not be complete without proposing an agency

that can challenge a judge's scorecard should it radically fail to reflect the cumulative perception of the outcome of any given round(s). Taking to task a judge's reasoning to deem their results approved or egregious. Approved: results stand. Egregious: decision overturned and judge suspended. But much like Martin Tupper, I suppose I too can dream on.

A.V. Julian

BOXING'S SOUL

Boxing isn't just a sport, it's a daily test of character.

I spend my days shaping fighters from raw potential into champions, and I've learned the real stories of boxing are rarely told. Fans see belts, highlight reels and big purses, but they don't see the cost. They miss the quiet mornings, the meals weighed to the gram, the pain masked behind calm eyes and the relentless discipline it takes to push when your body begs you to stop.

I often think of Jersey Joe Walcott, a man who clawed through setbacks and losses before finally becoming champion. That same spirit fuels today's fighters, yet so much of it remains hidden. One young heavyweight I'm building went from lifeguarding at his local pool at night to sparring with champions by day, proof that boxing is still a working man's sport built on sacrifice most will never see.

The beauty of boxing isn't only in the knockout, it's in the grind: the 5 a.m. roadwork, the lonely sacrifices, the mental battles fought in silence. That's where boxing's soul lives, where greatness is created long before the crowd roars.

Emmanuel Blessed

Boxing has always been more than just a sport to me – it's a living story of resilience, discipline and legacy. Growing up in the Philippines, I witnessed how Manny Pacquiao became more than a champion; he became a symbol of hope, uniting a nation every time he stepped into the ring. His story continues to inspire not only Filipinos but also boxing fans worldwide, proving that greatness can rise from humble beginnings.

Looking back, legends like Muhammad Ali and Sugar Ray Leonard defined eras, and today, fighters such as Canelo Alvarez, Tyson Fury and Naoya Inoue carry the sport forward. What excites me most is boxing's growing global stage, where talent from all over the world earns recognition. Still, I believe the sport must work harder to unify titles and ensure the best fight the best, just as Pacquiao always pursued throughout his career.

Boxing's past teaches us its greatness, and its present shows us its limitless potential.

Ian Raynel Ralf Orito

Muhammad Ali was known not only for his greatness in the ring but also for his motivational speeches. One of my favorite quotes of his is, "You don't lose if you get knocked down. You lose if you stay down." How many of us can relate to this quote? Life can be cruel at times. It can knock you down, but we don't have to stay there. Keep getting up. Proverbs 24:16 says, "The godly may trip seven times, but they will get up again."

One of my favorite fights, one that I can still watch till this day, is the first fight between Diego "Chico" Corrales and Jose Luis Castillo. This fight is straight out of a Hollywood script. Both fighters going at it, back and forth in a thriller. Castillo was known for his come-forward, Mexican-style boxing. Corrales was known for having power and the heart of a warrior. The fight was a war. Then came Round 10. This round could easily go down as one of the best rounds in boxing history. Both fighters come out. Castillo lands a monstrous left hook that drops Corrales! Corrales finds his way back to his feet, only to get dropped again. Everyone who is watching this is thinking the fight is over. Yet Corrales gets back up. He pushes forward, landing a right hook that stuns Castillo a bit. They both keep fighting. Corrales lands two left hooks that stop Castillo in his tracks. Castillo backs up against the ropes and Corrales lets out a barrage of punches, to which Castillo has no answers. The referee steps in to stop the fight, and Corrales comes out the winner. Think about it: After being knocked down twice, Corrales comes back and gets the TKO win.

Our mind can be our worst enemy at times. When we are down in life, we can choose to stay down and take the loss, or we can get back up and keep fighting. This fight will forever be one of my favorites. But it can also teach us a thing or two. Keep getting up. Remember those famous words from Ali: "You don't lose if you get knocked down. You lose if you stay down."

Joey Garza

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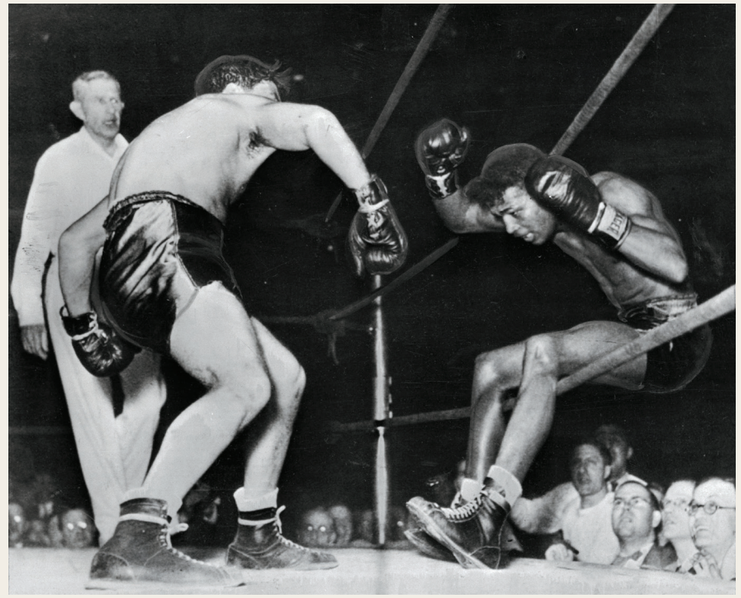
RINGSIDE By Doug Fischer

CHARLEY, RAY AND THE FORTIES



Close to 19,000 fans witnessed the Robinson-LaMotta rematch, which LaMotta won by decision.

The boxing schedule was pretty light in August, so I turned to YouTube and its treasure trove of vintage fights as I often do during slow periods. I soon found myself down a Charley Burley rabbit hole that was as frustrating as it was fascinating.

There's only one fight featuring the 1930s/'40s standout on YouTube – his 1946 rematch with Oakland Billy Smith – but it led me to several video essays on Burley, which I enjoyed for the most part. However, a recurring theme irked the hell out of me:

The notion that Sugar Ray Robinson "ducked" Burley.

I should note that these content creators believe several legends of the ring – including Henry Armstrong, Tony Zale, Marcel Cerdan and Billy Conn – avoided Burley, but some made sure to place Robinson's name in their essay titles while offering little or no evidence supporting the claim.

For the record, I don't believe that Armstrong, Cerdan or Conn avoided Burley. I do believe that Zale and Freddie Cochrane, the middleweight and welterweight champs during Burley's prime years, could have granted the talented Pennsylvanian a shot at their titles early in their respective reigns, but I also understand that World War II put their belts on ice from early 1942 until late 1945.

That's a part of Burley's tragic tale you don't often hear about from the content creators who I suppose would rather vilify golden age prizefighters than Hitler.

The other part of Burley's story that his enthusiasts almost never bring up is

that the man did not sell a lot of tickets. Unlike Robinson, Burley was not appreciated in his time – at least not by the general public.

By all accounts, he was a brilliant boxer-puncher but also careful and patient to a fault. Burley had power and the sublime technique and timing to land fight-ending punches, but he didn't hunt for knockouts. He was a matador, not a bull; a ringmaster, not necessarily a ring general.

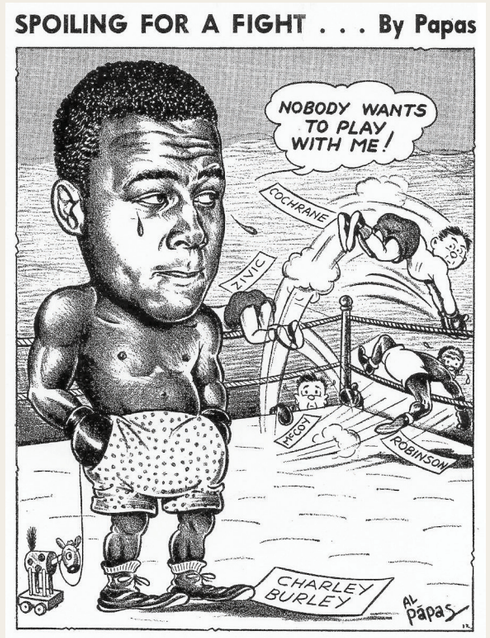
Burley's brand of boxing was only celebrated by the purists of his day and the other avoided contenders who shared the ring with him. The great trainer Eddie Futch maintained that Burley was the best he ever saw. Archie Moore, who Burley dominated over the 10-round distance in 1944, said the wily Pennsylvanian was the toughest he ever fought.

Those endorsements carry a lot of weight. And since his death in 1992 – the year he was inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame – Burley has gradually become something of a cult figure to a new generation of boxing purists, amateur historians and hardcore fans who take pride in contrarian takes via social media posts.

But in the 1930s and '40s, it took more than hipster adulation, "insider cred" and elite skills to move the needle. Fierce fighting and stone-cold KO artists are what grabbed headlines and filled arenas. Armstrong and Joe Louis were boxing's brightest stars in the late '30s despite being African Americans in a segregated, blatantly racist society.

And fans, more so then than now, were unapologetically bloodthirsty. Which is why both Cochrane and Zale sought out Rocky Graziano when they resumed their careers following WWII. Their primes were in the rearview mirror and they knew Rocky would try to kill them – which he nearly did in five brutal bouts that produced The Ring's 1945, 1946 and 1947 Fight of the Year – but they also knew they would be paid handsomely, thanks to the huge crowds and gates the popular middleweight slugger produced.

TV was a new medium in this decade. Networks weren't paying out large license fees to broadcast boxing and there were no casinos or billionaire benefactors subsidizing promotions. The only way anyone got paid back then was by getting lots of butts into those seats.



Burley had the ability to outpoint – even outclass – both Zale and Cochrane but not the ability to attract 18,000-plus to Madison Square Garden as Graziano did twice with Cochrane. Graziano's three immortal wars with Zale were waged at stadiums in the Bronx, Chicago and Newark.

Burley, who fought out of Pittsburgh and later Minnesota, was not a stadium fighter and he never fought at The Mecca of Boxing. In fact, Burley fought in New York City just one time during his 98-bout pro career. He fought once in Boston, once in Chicago, and never in Detroit, which is an insane stat given how prominent those fight towns were during the 1940s. I think it's an indication of how promoters in those cities perceived Burley.

Robinson, on the other hand, was the toast of New York City as an amateur. He made his pro debut at Madison Square Garden where he quickly developed into a headliner, starting with his 1941 bout against Maxie Shapiro. More than 10,000 paid to see the skinny 20-year-old overwhelm the veteran in three rounds.

Robinson's popularity and purse demands (which sometimes included a percentage of the gate) only grew from that point on as fans clamored to see the Harlem sensation in NYC, Detroit, Philadelphia, Cleveland, Chicago and Boston.

At the time of Robinson's first MSG main event, Burley, who turned pro in 1936, already had 45 pro bouts under his belt (compared to Ray's 24 bouts). Robinson, who turned pro in late 1940 and fought at lightweight until the end of 1941, would need a little time before being ready for such a seasoned and skilled potential opponent.

However, by the time Robinson grew into the welterweight division in 1942, Burley's days of making 147 had clearly passed him by.

Burley fought an astounding 17 times in 1942 but dipped under 150 pounds for only one of those bouts. He weighed between 152-158 in 1943 and entered The Ring's middleweight rankings in 1944, occupying a top-three spot until being removed for inactivity in 1947.

Robinson's 14-0 campaign in 1942 earned him The Ring's Fighter of the Year award. One of his victories was against crosstown rival Jake LaMotta, a fearsome young middleweight contender who Robinson would fight four more times between 1943-1945.

If Robinson was willing to roll the dice against The Bronx Bull, couldn't he have fought Burley during this period? Yes, of course. But did any major promoter or venue want that

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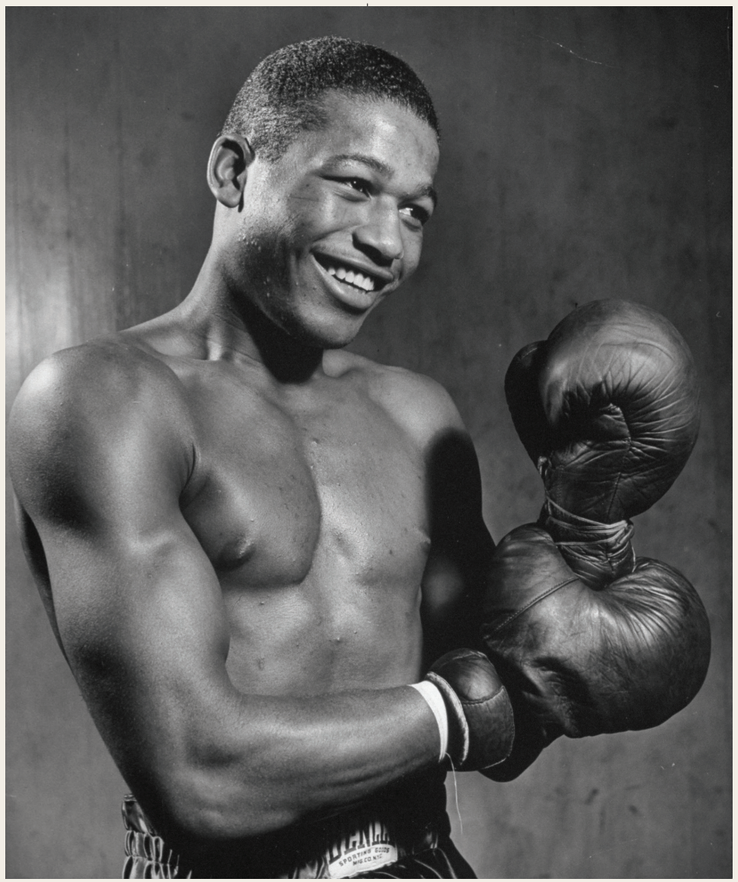

matchup? Not on the East Coast, where Robinson's fans were. And would Robinson have been paid in the $15,000-$25,000 range for a Burley fight, as he was for the LaMotta bouts? I don't think so, which is why Ray risked his neck against the popular Italian-American bruiser, just as Zale and Cochrane did with Graziano.

Robinson's fights with LaMotta were not easy. LaMotta's suffocating pressure and weight advantage in their rematch (160½ pounds to Ray's 144½) led to the first loss of Robinson's career. However, all five bouts did strong business – especially for non-title showdowns between young up-and-comers (Jake was only 20 and Ray was 21 when they first shared the ring). Bout No. 1 attracted 12,748 to Madison Square Garden;

By 1942, a 21-year-old Robinson was already among boxing's top attractions.

almost 19,000 gathered at Olympia Stadium in Detroit for the rematch; 15,000 attended the rubbermatch (also at Olympia Stadium); 18,000 filled MSG for bout No. 4; and 14,755 assembled at Comiskey Park in Chicago for their fifth tussle, a 12-round split decision that the welterweight had to gut out.

Robinson was not one to avoid challenges, and he wasn't afraid to lose despite his sterling record, but he also knew his worth.

If anyone says, "That's not fair, Dougie, you're giving Robinson a pass that you never gave to modern stars like Floyd Mayweather Jr.," allow me to remind them it's not the same scenario. Top fighters of Mayweather's era and this current era are guaranteed exorbitant paydays regardless of who they fight, what kind of ratings they get or how many tickets they sell.

I wish Burley were more popular and appreciated during his fighting days. I wish he could have still made welterweight when Robinson was a welterweight, or maybe he could have held off retirement long enough to face the middleweight version of Sugar Ray.

But saying Robinson swerved Burley is like saying Pernell Whitaker avoided Terry Norris or Mayweather ducked Winky Wright. Could Whitaker and Norris have conceivably shared the ring in 1995 when Sweet Pea lifted the WBA 154-pound belt from Julio Cesar Vasquez? Would Wright have boiled his body back down to junior middleweight for a fight with Mayweather after "Money" won the WBC 154-pound strap from Oscar De La Hoya in 2007?

The answer is yes, but fans were not clamoring for those matchups, so the fact those bouts never happened should not detract from Whitaker's and Mayweather's greatness.

And Norris and Wright did not need those pound-for-pound stars on their ledgers to be inducted into the IBHOF. Same deal with Burley. He's enshrined because of the fights he had against fellow Hall of Famers – Moore, Ezzard Charles, Fritzie Zivic, Holman Williams, Lloyd Marshall, Jimmy Bivins and Billy Soose – not for the fights that did not happen.

We can give the man his flowers without pissing on Robinson's reputation and legacy.

★★★★

Do you agree with my take on Robinson-Burley? There was a lot of information on their respective careers that could not be fit into this column, so I'd welcome further discussion and debate. Share your opinions via Comeoutwriting@gmail.com. RING

Al Fenn

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A LITTLE RESPECT

By Al Bernstein

The fight I am most looking forward to in the remainder of this year is the November 22 junior bantamweight title unification match between Ring/WBC/WBO champion Jesse "Bam" Rodriguez and Fernando Martinez, the WBA titleholder.

Part of the upcoming Ring IV fight card in Riyadh, this is as close to a can't-miss match as we are likely to get. Barring a clash of heads or some other bizarre event, it should be round after round of exciting, well-fought action.

While Rodriguez is on most pound-for-pound lists, and many (including me) are suggesting he is almost a future Hall of Famer already, the 34-year-old Martinez has a different place in the sport. He is undefeated at 18-0, has held a world title at 115 pounds since 2022 and has participated in four of the most exciting matches his division has seen in recent years. With all that, he's a fighter who somehow remains in the shadows. Elsewhere in this magazine you can see a richly deserved story about him, but in general he has not gotten the attention he deserves. Thus, he will be among the first boxers to receive my newly created "Rodney" award, named after the great comedian Rodney Dangerfield for fighters who can honestly say, "I don't get no respect." I feel qualified to create these awards because I was friends with Rodney.

Before handing out these awards, I will digress with this backstory.

Rodney, as it would happen, was a big boxing fan. I met him at the Olympic Lounge in Caesars Palace the night before the Marvin Hagler-Tommy Hearns fight, which I called the next day. This was the same lounge where, two years later, before the Hagler-Sugar Ray Leonard fight, Rodney would come to see me sing and perform. In that time, we had struck up a friendship.

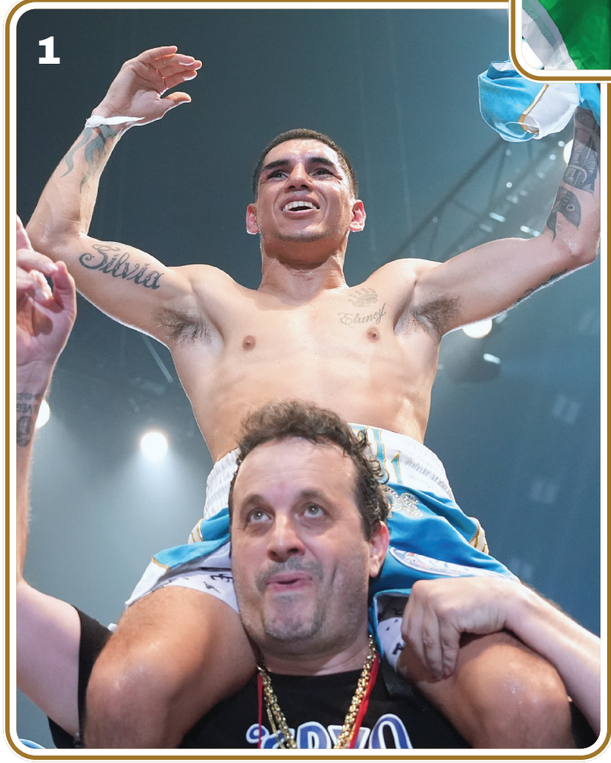
My favorite Rodney story is the ultimate in life imitating art. In the 1980s, I was doing a pay-per-view and we were only about five minutes from going on the air. I was on my mark ringside, ready to go on camera for the top of the show, when I noticed out of the corner of my eye a commotion to my left. It was Rodney, who I was slated to have a drink with after the show, talking to a slightly ruffled pair of ushers. It was not hard to figure out from the gestures and body language that they were indicating that his seat was taken and they didn't have another one for him. I knew immediately what was happening. Rodney had a "promoter's" ticket that gives you a seat in the front row, but without an assigned seat. If there is a mistake and too many are given out and/or you are too late (as he was), you can have a problem. So, this big star was being told he did not have a seat, and in this packed house there were no other ones available ringside. This could have been a *Saturday Night Live* parody of Rodney getting "no respect."

It was just about to be a major embarrassment when I took my earpiece out and started over to where the ruckus was as the stage manager loudly implored me to get back to my mark because we were about two minutes from going on the air. I grabbed Rodney and took him to our ringside table, where I asked the stage manager to give his chair to Rodney. I jumped back to my spot, got wired up for the show and put my

earpiece back in just in time to hear an apoplectic producer counting down "five … four ... three …," and a few seconds later I welcomed the television audience to the show. Rodney stayed with me ringside all night, passing me funny notes throughout the show. I enjoyed doing that telecast as much as any I ever did.

So, without any further ado, here are the recipients of the inaugural Rodneys:

1. Fernando Martinez: He was a little-known 13-0 fighter from Argentina in February 2022 when he challenged IBF 115-pound titleholder Jerwin Ancajas, who was making the 10th defense of his crown. I was there calling the match on Showtime, and on the surface it seemed this was a routine defense of Ancajas' title to set up his next fight against one of the other great champions of the time at 115. In the fight before this, we had a major upset with Hector Luis Garcia beating Chris Colbert, and apparently something was in the air. Having fought not-so-great opposition for his first 13 wins, Martinez was facing by far the best opponent of his career, but it didn't seem to bother him at all. He and Ancajas produced a 12-round war, with Martinez winning by a solid margin. Martinez would repeat this win in the rematch seven months later in another barnburner, defend against the previously undefeated Jade Bornea and then win two thrilling matches against legendary Japanese champion Kazuto Ioka. This five-fight body of work is as impressive as it gets, and yet somehow his name is seldom in the minds of those writing or talking about the exciting and excellent champions in the sport. If he wins in November against Rodriguez, I have to assume that will change. It would make for as good a six-fight run as anyone has had for many years, and it would likely mean he would never be eligible for another Rodney.



2. Aaron McKenna: This 26-year-old from Ireland is an exciting, switch-hitting middleweight who is 16-0, with all his wins being dominant ones. Most recently, he won a lopsided 12-round decision over former 154-pound titleholder Liam Smith. He sent Smith to the canvas with a brutal left hook to the body in Round 12 to punctuate this win. A demonstration of how deserving he is of a Rodney is the fact that he beat Uisma Lima by a wide margin in a 2023 decision, and yet it was Lima who was picked to fight Boots Ennis in a high-profile match on October 11. McKenna not only wins, but he has a fan-friendly style while doing it. Perhaps part of his problem is he is a middleweight – a division that is not getting much respect as a whole these days.

3. Andy Hiraoka: This undefeated lefty has been the No. 1 WBA contender in the 140-pound division for quite a while, but even a WBA-ordered negotiation with beltholder Gary Antuanne Russell in April did not produce a title shot. So no, respect is not coming his way, nor is much attention from the boxing world. Until fairly recently, even his fellow Japanese fighters who hold titles have been mostly rendered invisible to large parts of the world due to a lack of international coverage. So a contender can certainly get lost in the shuffle, especially in a division like 140, which is possibly the deepest in the sport. Hiraoka is literally never mentioned when pundits or fans talk about the top junior welterweight contenders. I can tell you that he is worthy. He is a stylish boxer-puncher with power to spare – 19 stoppages in his 24 wins. He has not heard the bell ring in the final round of a fight since 2019. He is a part of his country's amazing wave of terrific fighters, and as Willy Loman said in *Death of a Salesman*, "attention must be paid."

McKenna: Richard Pelham Baraou: Justin Setterfield

4. Abass Baraou: For 17 fights, this German 154-pounder was the model of consistency against good opposition, with only a controversial split decision loss to former top contender Jack Culcay to soil his record. Few believed he could go to another level, but he did. In August, he upset undefeated and highly regarded Yoenis Tellez in a convincing win cemented by a late knockdown. He has improved at every stage of his career, and this humble gladiator is just the kind of "Rodney" winner that you hope gets recognition as a true player in the talented 154-pound division. For The Ring's part, Baraou was admitted into the junior middleweight top 10 as a result of the victory.

One time, backstage in his dressing room after a show at Caesars Palace, I remember the actual Rodney talking to me almost wistfully about all the hard work and hardships it took to reach the top of the heap as a comedian. He chuckled and referenced his onstage persona, saying, "Respect is earned, and I earned it." The same can be said of the "Rodney" winners in this column. RING

A RARE GENTLEMAN

By Steve Kim

The boxing world was stunned and saddened when it was announced in late July that noted trainer Tommy Brooks had passed away at the age of 71 after a battle with colon cancer. Brooks was a fixture in the corner of a multitude of world-class boxers throughout the past few decades.

Brooks worked with Rocky Lockridge, Evander Holyfield, Vassiliy Jirov, Mike Tyson and the Klitschko brothers, among several other standouts.

He was known for his straightforward, no-nonsense style with boxers and always being cooperative with the media. With Brooks, you knew what you were getting: a consummate pro and a decent human being. There was universal respect for him as both a trainer and a person.

Brooks was born in Little Rock, Arkansas, but grew up in San Diego, California. He was the oldest of 11 children. During his teenage years, he began boxing at the Archie Moore ABC Club and became a noted amateur competitor. Brooks won a multitude of national tournaments, a signature accomplishment being a victory against Michael Spinks for the 1975 AAU middleweight championship. After embarking on a short professional career, he retired from the ring and began training fighters in 1982.

In due time, he became closely associated with Main Events and the talented stable of boxers who were led in the corner by the dynamic duo of George Benton and Lou Duva.

Main Events was on its way to becoming a promotional powerhouse, as they eventually signed most of the highly decorated 1984 U.S. Olympic squad that included Holyfield, Pernell Whitaker, Mark Breland and Meldrick Taylor. Brooks would soon be spending a lot of time around them.

As that group of Olympians became standout pros, they were a constant presence on nationally televised shows on various networks, as were those assisting Benton and Duva. You were invariably going to see either Brooks or another young trainer who himself would go on to big things in boxing – Ronnie Shields.

"That was definitely like going to college," Shields told The Ring. "Lou and George were the best of the best. The best in the world to work with, especially George. He was one of those guys who was so smart. He had seen everything, done everything. He was just unbelievable to work with. I learned so much from him."

Like Brooks, Shields had hung up the gloves and transitioned to training boxers. He caught the eye of Benton and Duva while working the pads with a boxer in the gym and was asked to join Main Events. "I knew I was very lucky," he said.

While Benton and Duva were the two sages in charge, Brooks and Shields were their trusty lieutenants in the gym. Their day-to-day responsibilities were pretty simple:

"Whatever George wanted us to do, basically," said Shields. "He'd say, 'I want you to do the hand pads with this guy. I need you to make him do certain things.' Whatever George felt needed to be done, Tommy and I basically had to do that."

Boxing, like many other businesses, is built on relationships. Throughout the years, Brooks made influential friends that would serve him well. One of them was Gary Gittelsohn, who at that time was a close friend of Shelly Finkel (who managed Holyfield, Whitaker, Breland and Taylor) and attended many of the Main Events cards of that era. He quickly struck up a close bond with Brooks.

"Almost from the get-go, I thought he was a rare guy in that he was a gentleman – and a gentleman in a very tough profession," said Gittelsohn, who remembers sharing many meals with the up-and-coming trainer. "So when I started managing fighters, Tommy was a natural fit, both professionally – because he really knew the craft – and personally, because we got along so well."

Gittelsohn's most prized client was Junior "Poison" Jones. After the untimely passing of trainer Joey Fariello, it was Brooks who was an easy choice to take over. "It was a really good combination," said Gittelsohn. "They worked really well together."

In the following years, the likes of future titleholder Yuri Foreman and Jerson Ravelo were sent over to Brooks by the manager.

Brooks was with Holyfield when he upset Tyson in 1996.

"I knew when I delivered a fighter to Tommy that my job was already halfway done," stated Gittelsohn. "Everything about him was professional. The communication was professional. I would know after every workout how much they weighed coming into the workout, how much they weighed leaving the workout, what they needed to work on, what things concerned him. The communication was unbelievable. I never really had it with any other trainer. He was remarkable."

And not only did Brooks get into the Duva family business, he became a family member when he married Lou's daughter Donna. Her brother Dino, who worked on the promotional side of Main Events, said: "It was all for the good. My father loved Tommy. He brought him along. Tommy worked under my father and George Benton for a long time and he became one great trainer. He and Donna were married right till the end."

Throughout the years, Dino's admiration for Brooks only grew.

"Just a solid guy," he said. "Not the kind of guy who is abrasive or anything like that. He was easy to get along with and had a great sense of humor. As a person in private life, he was a great guy."

Duva does have one regret. He says that after his sister and brother-in-law moved to Georgia from New Jersey a few years ago, "I kind of lost touch with them. We all did. That's something that will always bother me. But life is like that sometimes."

But they will always have memories of when Main Events was on top of the boxing world as they battled the likes of Bob Arum and Don King and put on some of the biggest events in the sport. It truly was the best of times for them.

"Yeah, those were the days. Those were the fun days," said Duva wistfully. "I look back and think about it a lot, and it was just a great time. We were growing. We were all working together. Everybody was happy. It was a great time in the business; we were doing network shows almost every week. It was a great time. It's a shame how some things ended up with our company and everything in our family.

"We had some tragedies we had to deal with, but it was a great time and I look back at that and I feel good inside at the way it was. But I really always thought very highly of Tommy. I always thought he was a great guy." RING

Michael Steele - EMPICS

ONWARD TO VALHALLA

IN **DWIGHT MUHAMMAD QAWI, DON ELBAUM** AND **TOMMY BROOKS**, WE LOST A TRIO OF BOXING ARCHETYPES IN JULY 2025

by Don Stradley

During the early days of The Ring magazine, back when boxing held a more significant place in the American public's imagination, founder and editor Nat Fleischer had a standard response when a fighter passed away. "He has gone on to boxing's Valhalla," he'd say, citing the hall in Norse mythology where the souls of fallen warriors gathered. Occasionally, one of the legendary artists who worked for Nat, usually the great Ted Carroll, would draw a beautiful rendition of the deceased fighter. Sometimes there'd be a caricature of a boxer with angel wings, entering the afterlife, greeted by greats of the past. It was cornball stuff, but only a complete ogre would fail to be at least slightly moved.

One can only imagine how the recent deaths of Dwight Muhammad Qawi, Don Elbaum and Tommy Brooks would've been handled, a trio that Fleischer would assure us had entered Valhalla.

Carroll would've had a great time illustrating Qawi, that bulldog of a fighter who always looked like he was smiling as he wore his opponents down. "I don't enjoy beating up people," Qawi once said, "but I will do what I have to do." Yet Qawi also possessed a humanitarian side, spending his later years as a drug and alcohol counselor. Of all the stories of people who found redemption through boxing, his would rank near the top.

It was in September 1981, during an NBC bout televised from Rahway State Prison in New Jersey, that many boxing fans got their first look at Qawi, who was then known as Dwight Braxton. He'd once been an inmate there, but this time, he was a boxer, facing James Scott, a light heavyweight contender fighting from behind prison walls. Though Scott's incarceration story garnered the network's attention, it was Braxton who muscled his way to a 10-round decision win.

Three months later, Braxton scored a shocking 10th-round stoppage of Matthew Saad Muhammad to win the Ring/WBC light heavyweight championship in Atlantic City. "It was a sound thrashing that no one could have predicted," reported Newark's Star-Ledger. A rematch in 1982 saw the seemingly invincible Braxton stop Saad Muhammad again, this time in six one-sided rounds. He'd dreamed of being known as a great fighter instead of an ex-con, and he'd done it.

He'd been a Camden, New Jersey, kid, one of 13 siblings. He spent his teen years in and out of reform schools and eventually served five years at Rahway for the armed robbery of a liquor store. When Braxton was 25, with a bit of experience in the prison boxing program and a winning record in street fights, he found his way to the rugged atmosphere

Qawi "buzzsawed" Matthew Saad Muhammad to a sixth-round TKO in their 1982 rematch.

Elbaum (left) conducting business at the Blue Horizon in 2009.

of Joe Frazier's Philadelphia gym. With no amateur background and the likes of Jimmy Young and Boogaloo Watts working on the bags next to him, he spent a year and a half learning the techniques of boxing. He reminded many of Smokin' Joe himself, all swarming energy and tireless aggression. He became known as the "Camden Buzzsaw," as appropriate a nickname as there has ever been in boxing. Braxton's father had been a lumberjack, which may have inspired the moniker.

In November 1982, after converting to Islam, Braxton had his name legally changed to Dwight Muhammad Qawi. Promoters objected, since fans had only recently gotten to know him by his original surname, but he couldn't be dissuaded. After his two wins over Saad Muhammad, along with impressive outings against Jerry Martin and Eddie Davis, it looked like Qawi would hold on to the light heavyweight title for a long time.

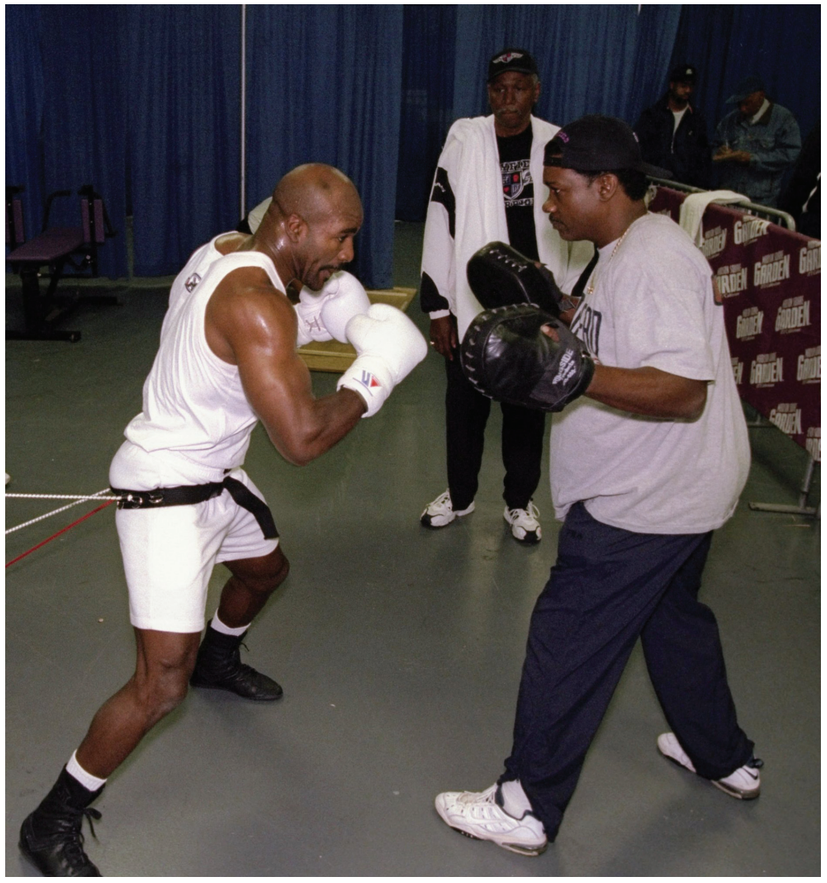
Looking back, however, Qawi had already peaked. In 1983, he put his championship on the line against WBA titlist Michael Spinks in a highly anticipated contest billed as "The Brawl for it All." In response to Qawi's toughness, Spinks turned into a hit-and-run strategist and outboxed Qawi over 15 dullish rounds to unify the belts. Qawi rebounded somewhat, stepping up in poundage to win the WBA cruiserweight title by stopping Piet Crous in 1985. One year later, he lost that title by 15-round split decision to Evander Holyfield in Atlanta. Qawi put the young Holyfield through a baptism by fire, but he came up short. "Maybe I'm getting too old for this," Qawi told a reporter. "Maybe I'd better start looking for something else to do."

Qawi was never the same after the bout with Holyfield. The old buzzsaw no longer screamed with the same ferocity, while his short, 5-foot-6½ frame looked thicker each year. A rematch with Holyfield in 1987 was expected to produce the same sparks as their first bout, but Qawi couldn't last four rounds. That was followed by an embarrassing loss to George Foreman in Las Vegas where, inexplicably, Qawi quit during the seventh round. As often happens with high-intensity, all-pressure fighters, it appeared Qawi's flame had burned out. He'd also reveal that he was drinking heavily during these years, putting away a fifth of whiskey every day.

His career continued in smaller venues against lesser-known opponents, but Qawi never figured in the big picture again. He was 45 when he finally retired for good in 1998. "I guess you could say I stayed past my dream," he said. By the time he left boxing, Qawi had a record of 41-11-1 with 25 knockouts and had won titles in two weight classes. Among his accolades was a 2004 induction into the International Boxing Hall of Fame, while The Ring named his first bout with Holyfield as the cruiserweight fight of the decade.

Qawi entered a rehabilitation program in 1990 to deal with his alcohol addiction, and it was in the milieu of counseling that he found purpose in his post-boxing life. Working with troubled youth was his specialty. By the mid-1990s, he was part of a Pleasantville, New Jersey, youth services group. Determined to help kids, Qawi held meetings in storefronts, brought them bowling or, in many cases, just provided a friendly voice and an open ear. As Qawi put it, he was their mirror.

Qawi died on July 25, 2025, in a Baltimore nursing home. He was 72 and according to his family had been diagnosed with dementia in 2020. He is survived by two sons and two grandsons. His death was not just a loss for boxing, but a loss for the many wayward teens who came to him for guidance. "Somehow," Qawi once said, "they've got to be made to believe they're worth loving."



Brooks puts Holyfield through his paces in 1996.

Don Elbaum, who died at age 94 on July 27, did much of his work in the same Atlantic City-Philadelphia circuit as Qawi, so it is rather surprising that, in such a small world as boxing, they never worked together. The closest they came was in the early 1990s when Elbaum tried to match Qawi with Ricky Parkey. The fight came off in Washington, D.C., anyway, just without Elbaum's special touch. No matter. He had an amazing career of promoting and matchmaking, even without Qawi on his resume.

In a business where too many are referred to as "Runyonesque," Elbaum indeed seemed like a character from the colorful world of Damon Runyon. One of the great Elbaum stories, and there are dozens of them, had to do with a ringside physician not showing up on fight night. Without blinking, Elbaum had a tongue depressor handy and was soon examining the fighters. Elbaum was a scrapper, a dealmaker, a guy who could make something out of nothing, could take a fighter on his last legs and squeeze a few more fights out of him, whether it was Bennie Briscoe or Eric "Butterbean" Esch. He wasn't above a bit of trickery but was too likable to be called a crook. Hence, we call him a charmer, a rogue, a scamp. He never quite made the big time, but he was forever on the perimeter. As writer Jack Hirsch said of him in a Boxing News article from 2023, "Elbaum has always dreamed big but has often come up small."

Yet a thousand small victories earned Elbaum his International Boxing Hall of Fame induction in 2019. How could you deny a man who once arranged a photo op with Sugar Ray Robinson and handed him two left-handed gloves? This, no less, after claiming the gloves had been worn by Robinson in his first pro fight. Ring announcer Michael Buffer owes his career to Elbaum, who first hired the golden-throated one to introduce a parking lot show in Pleasantville. And though he often apologized for it, Elbaum helped Don King enter the business, a development that shaped the next several decades of professional boxing.

Perhaps Elbaum's greatest accomplishment was during the 1980s, when he ran 196 shows at the Tropicana in Atlantic City. It was an astounding feat, considering he had no television contract and no superstars fighting for him. The shows, which spanned a bit less than five years, usually consisted of aging fighters and newcomers, all of whom were aiming to prove their worth, and were good enough to keep the customers coming back. Elbaum was probably the last promoter to try a weekly show at a single venue. No one would dare now.

If Elbaum's five-year run at the Tropicana was his heyday, the rest of his career was a mix of modest successes and comical disasters. One of his memorable moments came in 1969 when he promoted a nationally televised Las Vegas bout between former champion Sonny Liston and Leotis Martin. Elbaum had a piece of Martin's contract and was on very good terms with Liston, so for Elbaum it was a win-win situation. He all but promised that the winner would be matched with new heavyweight titlist Joe Frazier. When Martin knocked Liston cold in the ninth round, it certainly looked as if Elbaum had himself an exciting young contender. But in a Runyonesque moment of bad fate, Martin suffered an eye injury during the bout and doctors advised him to never fight again. Martin was done, and Liston, who had been decisively knocked out, was about as marketable as a dead fish. Maybe someone should've coined the term "Elbaumesque," because such things could only happen to Don Elbaum.

Born at the height of the Great Depression in 1931, Elbaum's early years in Erie, Pennsylvania, were highlighted by watching an uncle perform in dusty amateur rings, whetting a young boy's appetite for pugilism. After his own stint as an amateur, Elbaum embarked on a deliciously misspent youth working Wild West shows and carnivals. We can almost see Elbaum hustling through the fairgrounds, a young man learning the art of the grift and the quick dodge – skills that would serve him well in his later pursuits. And it was a rare interview where Elbaum didn't vaguely allude to gigs involving brothels and prostitutes. What went on was never clear, but it seemed Elbaum spent a lot of time in and around these shadow-draped establishments. There was also an army stint and a marriage that came and went, but boxing was Elbaum's first and only love. "Boxing is in my blood," he once said. "It's a beautiful sickness."

As a PFC stationed in Korea, Elbaum reportedly oversaw the best floating craps game in Seoul, by which he raised enough money to begin promoting fights when he returned to Erie. Back then, Elbaum was high on a local heavyweight named Bob Walters. When he booked Walters for an exhibition at an Erie veteran's home, the sparring partner's failure to show up led to Elbaum donning 16-ounce gloves and a helmet. According to Elbaum, he accidentally tapped Erie's new boxing hope on the chin and knocked him out. An Elbaumesque moment, indeed.

Unfazed, Elbaum promoted his first boxing show at Erie's Gannon Auditorium in December of 1954. Knowing that famous fighters wouldn't come to Erie, Elbaum used the formula that served him throughout his career: matching lesser-known fighters who provided lots of action. Paid attendance for that first Don Elbaum show: 867. From there, despite some stretches where he was stranded in dank motels without two nickels to his name, it was an enviable life.

Like Qawi, Tommy Brooks was a New Jersey guy. Like Elbaum, his presence was felt across boxing as he worked the corners of several important fighters of the 1990s and 2000s. His recent passing at age 71 from cancer meant that boxing had lost one of its nice guys.

Brooks was a quiet force, a thoughtful trainer who had served valuable apprenticeships under great trainers of a previous era, including Eddie Futch and Lou Duva. They instilled in him the patience it takes to train a fighter and the confidence required to man the corner between rounds. Those lessons appeared to culminate in Las Vegas on November 9, 1996. That was the night Brooks coached Evander Holyfield to a stunning 11th-round TKO of Mike Tyson for the WBA heavyweight title.

But even Brooks, as humble and levelheaded a man as can be found in boxing, was vulnerable to the occasional pipe dream. Somewhat shockingly, he would eventually sever a longstanding relationship with Holyfield to join Tyson's camp. With optimism that would've impressed Don Elbaum, Brooks believed he could somehow resurrect the shopworn ex-champion and guide him back to the top.

Brooks kept Tyson undefeated for six fights during that stormy 1999-2001 period – two of the bouts were recorded as "no contests" – a significant achievement, considering Tyson's increasingly bizarre behavior and a meddling entourage Brooks described as "idiots." The reward for his troubles, as Tyson's fight with Lennox Lewis loomed, was that Tyson's team fired him as part of a cost-cutting measure. Brooks later admitted to ESPN that he should've stayed with Holyfield.

Though there were no happy endings with Tyson and company, Brooks had a litany of great experiences with fighters ranging from Rocky Lockridge and Pernell Whitaker to the Klitschko brothers. He often said that a trainer was only as good as the fighter who hired him, and judging by the names on his resume, Brooks was a very good trainer indeed. As Holyfield said upon hearing of Brooks' death, "They don't make them like him anymore." Tyson recalled Brooks as a "great boxing man and even better person."

It is weirdly fitting that Qawi, Elbaum and Brooks died within days of each other. They belong together, in a way, and not only because they were all members of the New Jersey Boxing Hall of Fame. In this trio, we see the key boxing archetypes: the troubled young man who redeems himself through boxing, the schemer always looking for the big score and the good-hearted trainer who maintains a cool head. They represent three distinct types who have always existed in boxing. Each was a dreamer, and dreams are the fuel that makes boxing run. RING

CLASSIC

DON ELBAUM

By Joe Santoliquito

Don Elbaum was an affable leprechaun and a living fount of stories – some real, some not. In the world of boxing, he was able to thrive and become a Hall of Famer.

Elbaum always seemed to do things with a mischievous, amicable wink, and it is probably why he was so embraced by those who knew him and why his passing at the age of 94 on July 27 reverberated throughout the boxing world. His death and impact were eulogized in everything from the Erie Times-News to The New York Times.

In a sense, that was Elbaum, someone who covered a wide swath of boxing with his earthy wit and shenanigans. His eight-decade-long career was compared to Don Quixote tilting toward boxing windmills. He had the bombast of P.T. Barnum, always looking for an angle to attract attention, and was an iconoclast when it came to the conventional ways of doing business.

"But Don never meant any harm to anyone, and I think it's why everyone had a tendency to look the other way when it came to Don," said Hall of Fame promoter Lou DiBella, the former head of programming for HBO Sports. "He was able to hold your attention through these wonderful, incredible, remarkable stories, and a percentage of them were true. I loved talking to him. I refuse to tell one Don Elbaum story, because Don's entire life was telling a story. Don was a lovable, colorful scoundrel – a well-intentioned scoundrel, I would say. Every fighter he had had some crazy backstory, and they really wouldn't. He would show up to my HBO office all the time with the shoe-polish black hair claiming he found the greatest heavyweight and I should come and see him at his show. I would go to the show and I couldn't tell who his guy was. (laughs)

"That was Don."

Hall of Fame boxing writer Ron Borges recalls a classic Elbaum yarn.

"He had to walk both sides of the street, like a lot of people who tried to make it in the world of boxing," Borges said. "At one point – I don't recall the specific time frame, but Don decides to set up a tournament for the heavyweight championship of Michigan. There were a number of fighters fighting here and there. The fighters weren't making much money, and several times they weren't getting paid at all. They did get to a final, which was held at the Joe Louis Arena in Detroit.

"The two fighters realize that they weren't going to get their full purses, though the winner was supposed to get a big trophy with a check. The fight took place. Someone won, someone unknown. Don gets into the ring, announces the heavyweight champion of Michigan, and it's all very exciting. The fighter, knowing he's not going to get the full amount promised by Don, says to him, 'Don, I want my fucking trophy. Me and all my guys, Detroit guys, aren't leaving this ring until I get my fucking trophy, and neither are you!'

"Don, being Don, promised the fighter that the trophy was back in the locker room. The fighter says, 'No, I want my fucking trophy now! Right here!'"

So Elbaum left and came back 15 minutes later with the biggest trophy anyone ever saw: a two-foot-tall bronze award. The fighter was excited. The fans were excited. The attending local media descended on the ring taking photos of the fighter with the trophy for the next day's newspapers. The fighter never received the promised purse – but he did receive a garish prize for his effort.

Early the next morning, there was pounding on the fighter's apartment door. He got up groggy and answered.

"It was the cops, who came bursting into the fighter's apartment," Borges continued, laughing. "'Where the hell is Gordie Howe's MVP trophy?' The fighter had no idea what the cops were talking about. It turns out, Don smashed the Joe Louis Arena trophy case, grabbed the biggest trophy he could find, which was Gordie Howe's trophy, which had a hockey player on the top. No one noticed. They were just happy to get the trophy. Later, Don would say, 'Hey, look, I was just trying to make the kid happy.'"

That was Don. RING

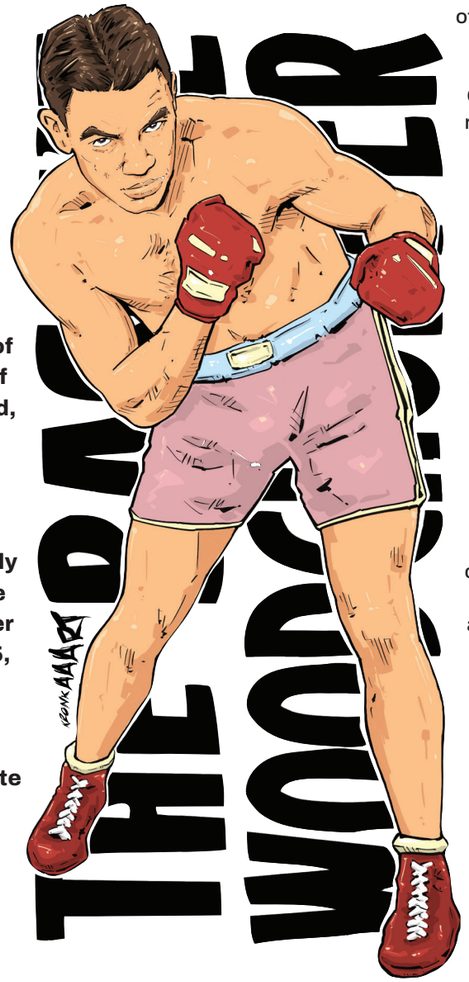
PA - PA Images

BY THE NUMBERS:

PAULINO UZCUDUN

by Don Stradley • Illustration by KronkAAArt

As Impressionist painters once took inspiration from the light and landscapes of Normandy, so it was with sportswriters of the 1920s and the unique face of Paulino Uzcudun. Providing the experts on press row with the challenge of describing him, Uzcudun was alternately portrayed as the fighter with the "Cro-Magnon cranium," a "grotesque human with thicket eyebrows" and, as one writer put it in 1929, a boxer whose nose was so flat "that a punch on it makes him snort for breath like a prize hog." When he wasn't amusing reporters with his craggy visage, this former butcher and competitive woodchopper from Basque Country, Spain, held his own with some of the best heavyweights of the post-Dempsey period, a time when dozens of contenders were taking big swings trying to get noticed. Uzcudun took their best shots and rarely wobbled. That is, until he fought a young contender named Joe Louis in 1935, when Uzcudun was past his prime. It is a shame that Uzcudun is best remembered as a footnote in Louis' career. He was much more than that. Here's his story by the numbers.



49 victories »

After starting his professional career in Europe, Uzcudun invaded American rings, particularly in New York. Sometimes called "The Spanish Lion of the Pyrenees," Uzcudun had a rough and rugged style in the ring, and even the biggest cynics on press row were impressed by his ability to absorb punishment. Fighting out of a crouch, his favorite tactic was to charge an opponent shoulder-first, gambling that some part of his body would connect and do some damage. Among his notable victims in that 1927-1932 period were K.O. Christner, Tom Heeney and Otto Von Porat (twice), the 1924 Olympic gold medalist who never quite panned out as a pro. Unfortunately, Uzcudun's awkwardness wasn't enough against the likes of Mickey Walker, Tommy Loughran, King Levinsky and others. Billed at times as the champion of Europe, Spain and Colombia, he finished his career with a record of 49-17-3, with 33 knockouts.

2 wins over future Hall of Famers »

Any fighter with wins over Harry Wills and Max Baer deserves some acclaim, even if, as in Uzcudun's case, Wills was well beyond his best and Baer was an unpredictable headcase who lost fights he should've won. Uzcudun stopped Wills in four at Ebbets Field in 1927, signaling the end of Wills' run as a contender. Uzcudun took his winnings from the fight and bought himself some gold teeth and a couple of high-powered roadsters.

Uzcudun fought Baer in Reno in 1931 as the main event of an outdoor Fourth of July show promoted and refereed by Jack Dempsey. Baer's clowning cost him; by the time the 20-round contest was over, Uzcudun had outhustled him for the decision, no mean feat in a boiling-hot ring described by the Associated Press as "a sun-scorched battle pit." Even Uzcudun marveled at the extreme Nevada heat. Taking a deep breath, he said it "was like sucking in hot flame."

3 bouts with Max Schmeling »

Their first fight in 1929 was a raw, no-holds-barred sort of contest, with Uzcudun smashing into Schmeling in his usual barnyard animal style, while the crafty German bided his time and ripped Uzcudun's face apart with jabs. Having injured his right hand early in the bout on the Basque's hard skull, Schmeling was content to work behind his left until it appeared blood was pouring from every available orifice on Uzcudun's head. Though Schmeling staggered him in the 14th, Uzcudun survived to finish the 15-rounder on his feet. The scorecards reflected what everyone at Yankee Stadium knew, that Schmeling had won by a wide margin. The fight had been a widely hyped New York event, with the winner expected to contend for the heavyweight title recently vacated by Gene Tunney.

The German and the Basque fought again five years later in Barcelona's Montjuic Stadium. With three rings side by side, the preliminary bouts were all fought simultaneously in what was billed as a boxing carnival. Uzcudun held Schmeling to a draw, though most in the press thought Schmeling had shaded him by a round. Their third encounter took place in 1935, this time in Berlin, Schmeling's turf. Schmeling won the 12-round decision, taking the lead in their series 2-0-1.

90,000 in attendance in Barcelona »

Uzcudun fought for some of the largest crowds ever recorded, including his 1930 bout with Primo Carnera in Barcelona. The split decision verdict for Carnera created some turbulence in the audience of 90,000, though it was hardly the bloody melee that Uzcudun's trainer, Whitey Bimstein, later recounted for the Associated Press. Among Bimstein's more ludicrous claims was that 300 people took refuge under the ring with him while the riot raged on.

1 title shot »

Claiming he'd been drugged prior to some recent bouts and no longer wanted to fight in the USA, Uzcudun fought exclusively in Europe in 1933 and ran off six consecutive wins. This put him in line to face the new champion and old rival: Carnera. Their bout was fought in Rome, where Carnera was treated as a national hero. On October 22, 1933, at a beautiful outdoor amphitheater with Italy's prime minister, Benito Mussolini, in attendance, Carnera won a 15-round decision and retained the championship. However, Carnera's grand night backfired. The Italian crowd, which was said to be 70,000, changed allegiance by the later rounds and began cheering for the Basque. It's not known what Mussolini thought.

27 1/4 pounds of exaggeration »

The second Carnera-Uzcudun contest occupied a spot in boxing lore as the highest combined weight for a title fight – 259½ for Carnera, 229¼ for Uzcudun, totaling 488¾ pounds. This record held until 2000, when Lennox Lewis and Michael Grant surpassed it by nine pounds. However, the weights given for Carnera and Uzcudun are probably false. An Associated Press report of the time, from "newspapermen who stood by the scales," claimed Carnera weighed 265, while Uzcudun came in at 202, which is more likely. How Uzcudun was ever reported as 229¼ is a mystery, though the promoter may have simply wanted him to seem bigger against the mountainous Carnera.

4 rounds with Joe Louis »

When asked to pick the best punch he'd ever thrown, Louis usually answered with one word: "Paulino." The blow in question was a right in the fourth round that destroyed Uzcudun's mouth and sent him down for the first time in his career. Unfamiliar with the feeling of canvas on his back, Uzcudun got to his feet, though referee Arthur Donovan took note of his sorry condition and stopped the bout. The decisive punch, reported a New Jersey sportswriter, "could be heard 10 rows back," while another observer wrote that the impact sounded "like the crack of a bullwhip on sheet metal."

According to legend, Louis' new wife, Marva, was so disturbed by the sight of Uzcudun's battered face that Louis suggested she stay away from his future fights. "It made Marva sick," Louis said.

It was the woodchopper's last bout. Uzcudun (1899-1985) left boxing, fought for the Nationalist side during the Spanish Civil War and lived a quiet life away from the headlines. In Ronald K. Fried's excellent book Corner Men, Bimstein recalled Uzcudun as "the finest character among the fighters I ever met, square as they make 'em, game and tough, and in his prime a match for any of 'em." Bimstein often bent the truth for the sake of a good story, but this time he spoke from the heart. RING

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Ring Ratings Through fights of August 30, 2025

Moses Itauma blasted through Dillian Whyte in one round.

Cris Esqueda/Golden Boy

Recent Fight Results

MEN

P4P: Ricardo Sandoval SD 12 Kenshiro Teraji (No. 9, out)
H: Filip Hrgovic (No. 6) UD 10 David Adeleye
H: Moses Itauma (in at No. 10) TKO 1 Dillian Whyte
175: Albert Ramirez (No. 6) TKO 7 Jerome Pampellone
154: Abass Baraou (in at No. 10) UD 12 Yoenis Tellez (No. 10, out)
147: Jaron Ennis (C) out, moved up in weight
130: Raymond Ford (No. 9) UD 10 Abraham Nova
135: Lucas Bahdi (No. 10) UD 12 Roger Gutierrez
126: Nick Ball (No. 3) UD 12 Sam Goodman (No. 4 at 122)
118: Daigo Higa (No. 5) D 12 Antonio Vargas (No. 10, ▲4)
118: Kenneth Llover (No. 10) TKO 8 Luis Concepcion
115: Ricardo Malajika (No. 9, ▲1) TKO 5 Jayson Mama
112: Ricardo Sandoval (No. 5, ▲4) SD 12 Kenshiro Teraji (No. 1, ▼1)
108: Kyosuke Takami (No. 10, ▲8) TKO 10 Erick Rosa (No. 8, out)
108: Carlos Canizales (No. 5, ▲4) KO 5 Panya Pradabsri (No. 9, out)
105: Dianxing Zhu (No. 6) removed for inactivity
105: Yudai Shigeoka (No. 4) retired

WOMEN

160: Claressa Shields (C) removed for inactivity
130: Mea Motu (No. 4) UD 10 Sara Jalonen
130: Elif Nur Turhan (in at No. 5) TKO 6 Rima Ayadi (No. 5, out)
126: Sky Nicolson (No. 3) KO 2 Urvashi Singh
115: Mizuki Hiruta (C) UD 10 Naomy Cardenas

MEN'S RING RATINGS Through Aug. 30, 2025

CHAMPIONSHIP BELTS: ◆ RING ◆ IBF ◆ WBA ◆ WBC ◆ WBO | ★ NEW TO RATINGS

HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT UNLIMITED

C	**OLEKSANDR USYK** ◆◆◆◆◆	Ukraine • 24-0-0 (15 KOs)
1	**TYSON FURY**	U.K. • 34-2-1 (24 KOs)
2	**JOSEPH PARKER**	New Zealand • 36-3-0 (24 KOs)
3	**AGIT KABAYEL**	Germany • 26-0-0 (18 KOs)
4	**DANIEL DUBOIS**	U.K. • 22-3-0 (21 KOs)
5	**ANTHONY JOSHUA**	U.K. • 28-4-0 (25 KOs)
6	**FILIP HRGOVIC**	Croatia • 19-1-0 (14 KOs)
7	**FABIO WARDLEY**	U.K. • 19-0-1 (18 KOs)
8	**ZHILEI ZHANG**	China • 27-3-1 (22 KOs)
9	**MARTIN BAKOLE**	Congo • 21-2-1 (16 KOs)
10	★ **MOSES ITAUMA**	U.K. • 13-0-0 (11 KOs)

CRUISERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 200 POUNDS

C	**JAI OPETAIA** ◆◆	Australia • 28-0-0 (22 KOs)
1	**GILBERTO RAMIREZ** ◆◆	Mexico • 48-1-0 (30 KOs)
2	**CHRIS BILLAM-SMITH**	U.K. • 21-2-0 (13 KOs)
3	**MICHAL CIESLAK**	Poland • 28-2-0 (22 KOs)
4	**RYAN ROZICKI**	Canada • 20-1-1 (19 KOs)
5	**BADOU JACK** ◆	Sweden • 29-3-3 (17 KOs)
6	**NOEL MIKAELIAN**	Armenia • 27-3-0 (12 KOs)
7	**YAMIL PERALTA**	Argentina • 17-1-1 (9 KOs)
8	**LEONARDO MOSQUEA**	France • 17-0-0 (10 KOs)
9	**ROBIN SIRWAN SAFAR**	Sweden • 18-0-0 (13 KOs)
10	**VIDDAL RILEY**	U.K. • 13-0-0 (7 KOs)

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 175 POUNDS

C	**DMITRY BIVOL** ◆◆◆◆	Russia • 24-1-0 (12 KOs)
1	**ARTUR BETERBIEV**	Russia • 21-1-0 (20 KOs)
2	**DAVID BENAVIDEZ** ◆	U.S. • 30-0-0 (24 KOs)
3	**CALLUM SMITH**	U.K. • 31-2-0 (22 KOs)
4	**ANTHONY YARDE**	U.K. • 27-3-0 (24 KOs)
5	**JOSHUA BUATSI**	U.K. • 19-1-0 (13 KOs)
6	**ALBERT RAMIREZ**	Venezuela • 22-0-0 (19 KOs)
7	**DAVID MORRELL**	Cuba • 12-1-0 (9 KOs)
8	**IMAM KHATAEV**	Australia • 10-1-0 (9 KOs)
9	**OLEKSANDR GVOZDYK**	Ukraine • 21-2-0 (17 KOs)
10	**WILLY HUTCHINSON**	U.K. • 18-2-0 (13 KOs)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 POUNDS

C	**CANELO ALVAREZ** ◆◆◆◆◆	Mexico • 63-2-2 (39 KOs)
1	**CHRISTIAN MBILLI**	France • 29-0-0 (24 KOs)
2	**DIEGO PACHECO**	U.S. • 24-0-0 (18 KOs)
3	**OSLEYS IGLESIAS**	Cuba • 13-0-0 (12 KOs)
4	**JOSE ARMANDO RESENDIZ**	Mexico • 16-2-0 (11 KOs)
5	**CALEB PLANT**	U.S. • 23-3-0 (14 KOs)
6	**HAMZAH SHEERAZ**	U.K. • 22-0-1 (18 KOs)
7	**BRUNO SURACE**	France • 26-1-2 (5 KOs)
8	**WILLIAM SCULL**	Cuba • 23-1-0 (9 KOs)
9	**VLADIMIR SHISHKIN**	Russia • 16-1-0 (10 KOs)
10	**BEKTEMIR MELIKUZIEV**	Uzbekistan • 16-1-0 (10 KOs)

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 POUNDS

C	**(VACANT)**	
1	**ZHANIBEK ALIMKHANULY** ◆◆	Kazakhstan • 17-0-0 (12 KOs)
2	**CARLOS ADAMES** ◆	Dom. Rep. • 24-1-1 (18 KOs)
3	**ERISLANDY LARA** ◆	U.S. • 31-3-3 (19 KOs)
4	**CHRIS EUBANK JR.**	U.K. • 35-3-0 (25 KOs)
5	**YOENLI HERNANDEZ**	Cuba • 8-0-0 (7 KOs)
6	**TROY ISLEY**	U.S. • 15-0-0 (5 KOs)
7	**ETINOSA OLIHA**	Italy • 21-0-0 (9 KOs)
8	**AARON MCKENNA**	Ireland • 20-0-0 (10 KOs)
9	**AUSTIN WILLIAMS**	U.S. • 19-1-0 (13 KOs)
10	**DENZEL BENTLEY**	U.K. • 21-3-1 (17 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 POUNDS

C	**(VACANT)**	
1	**TERENCE CRAWFORD** ◆	U.S. • 41-0-0 (31 KOs)
2	**VERGIL ORTIZ**	U.S. • 23-0-0 (21 KOs)
3	**SEBASTIAN FUNDORA** ◆	U.S. • 23-1-1 (15 KOs)
4	**ISRAIL MADRIMOV**	Uzbekistan • 10-2-1 (7 KOs)
5	**BAKHRAM MURTAZALIEV** ◆	Russia • 23-0-0 (17 KOs)
6	**SERHII BOHACHUK**	Ukraine • 26-2-0 (24 KOs)
7	**ERICKSON LUBIN**	U.S. • 27-2-0 (19 KOs)
8	**XANDER ZAYAS** ◆	Puerto Rico • 22-0-0 (13 KOs)
9	**JESUS RAMOS**	U.S. • 23-1-0 (19 KOs)
10	**ABASS BARAOU**	Germany • 17-1-0 (9 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 POUNDS

C	**(VACANT)**	
1	**BRIAN NORMAN JR.** ◆	U.S. • 28-0-0 (22 KOs)
2	**EIMANTAS STANIONIS**	Lithuania • 15-1-0 (9 KOs)
3	**GIOVANI SANTILLAN**	U.S. • 34-1-0 (18 KOs)
4	**ROHAN POLANCO**	Dom. Rep. • 17-0-0 (10 KOs)
5	**SHAKHRAM GIYASOV**	Uzbekistan • 17-0-0 (10 KOs)
6	**ALEXIS ROCHA**	U.S. • 25-2-1 (16 KOs)
7	**RAUL CURIEL**	Mexico • 16-0-1 (14 KOs)
8	**MARIO BARRIOS** ◆	U.S. • 29-2-2 (18 KOs)
9	**MANNY PACQUIAO**	Philippines • 62-8-3 (39 KOs)
10	**EKOW ESSUMAN**	U.K. • 22-1-0 (8 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 POUNDS

C	**TEOFIMO LOPEZ** ◆◆	U.S. • 22-1-0 (13 KOs)
1	**RICHARDSON HITCHINS** ◆	U.S. • 20-0-0 (8 KOs)
2	**SUBRIEL MATIAS** ◆	Puerto Rico • 23-2-0 (22 KOs)
3	**ALBERTO PUELLO**	Dom. Rep. • 24-1-0 (10 KOs)
4	**ARNOLD BARBOZA**	U.S. • 32-1-0 (11 KOs)
5	**LIAM PARO**	Australia • 26-1-0 (16 KOs)
7	**GARY ANTUANNE RUSSELL**◆	U.S. • 18-1-0 (17 KOs)
8	**SANDOR MARTIN**	Spain • 42-4-0 (15 KOs)
9	**DALTON SMITH**	U.K. • 18-0-0 (13 KOs)
10	**ANDY HIRAOKA**	Japan • 24-0-0 (19 KOs)
10	**LINDOLFO DELGADO**	Mexico • 23-0-0 (16 KOs)

Richard Pelham

MEN'S RING RATINGS Through Aug. 30, 2025

CHAMPIONSHIP BELTS: ◆ RING ◆ IBF ◆ WBA ◆ WBC ◆ WBO | ★ NEW TO RATINGS

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 POUNDS

C	(VACANT)	
1	**SHAKUR STEVENSON** ◆	U.S. • 24-0-0 (11 KOs)
2	**GERVONTA DAVIS** ◆	U.S. • 30-0-1 (28 KOs)
3	**RAYMOND MURATALLA**	U.S. • 23-0-0 (17 KOs)
4	**WILLIAM ZEPEDA**	Mexico • 33-1-0 (27 KOs)
5	**ANDY CRUZ**	Cuba • 6-0-0 (3 KOs)
6	**FLOYD SCHOFIELD**	U.S. • 19-0-0 (13 KOs)
7	**DENYS BERINCHYK**	Ukraine • 19-1-0 (9 KOs)
8	**SAM NOAKES**	U.K. • 17-0-0 (15 KOs)
9	**ABDULLAH MASON**	U.S. • 19-0-0 (17 KOs)
10	**LUCAS BAHDI**	Canada • 20-0-0 (15 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 POUNDS

C	(VACANT)	
1	**O'SHAQUIE FOSTER** ◆	U.S. • 23-3-0 (12 KOs)
2	**EMANUEL NAVARRETE** ◆	Mexico • 39-2-1 (32 KOs)
3	**ANTHONY CACACE**	Ireland • 24-1-0 (9 KOs)
4	**LAMONT ROACH** ◆	U.S. • 25-1-2 (10 KOs)
5	**EDUARDO NUNEZ** ◆	Mexico • 28-1-0 (27 KOs)
6	**ROBSON CONCEICAO**	Brazil • 19-3-1 (9 KOs)
7	**EDUARDO HERNANDEZ**	Mexico • 37-2-0 (32 KOs)
8	**CHARLY SUAREZ**	Philippines • 18-0-0 (10 KOs)
9	**RAYMOND FORD**	U.S. • 18-1-1 (8 KOs)
10	**JAMES DICKENS**	U.K. • 36-5-0 (15 KOs)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 POUNDS

C	(VACANT)	
1	**RAFAEL ESPINOZA** ◆	Mexico • 27-0-0 (23 KOs)
2	**ANGELO LEO** ◆	U.S. • 26-1-0 (12 KOs)
3	**NICK BALL** ◆	U.K. • 23-0-1 (13 KOs)
4	**STEPHEN FULTON** ◆	U.S. • 23-1-0 (8 KOs)
5	**LUIS ALBERTO LOPEZ**	Mexico • 31-3-0 (18 KOs)
6	**BRUCE CARRINGTON**	U.S. • 16-0-0 (9 KOs)
7	**BRANDON FIGUEROA**	U.S. • 26-2-1 (19 KOs)
8	**MIRCO CUELLO**	Argentina • 16-0-0 (13 KOs)
9	**ROBEISY RAMIREZ**	Cuba • 14-3-0 (9 KOs)
10	**NATHANIEL COLLINS**	U.K. • 17-0-0 (8 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 POUNDS

C	**NAOYA INOUE** ◆◆◆◆	Japan • 30-0-0 (27 KOs)
1	**MARLON TAPALES**	Philippines • 40-4-0 (21 KOs)
2	**MURODJON AKHMADALIEV**	Uzbekistan • 14-1-0 (11 KOs)
3	**LUIS NERY**	Mexico • 36-2-0 (28 KOs)
4	**SAM GOODMAN**	Australia • 20-1-0 (8 KOs)
5	**ALAN PICASSO**	Mexico • 32-0-1 (17 KOs)
6	**SHABAZ MASOUD**	U.K. • 14-0-0 (4 KOs)
7	**TJ DOHENY**	Ireland • 26-6-0 (20 KOs)
8	**RAMON CARDENAS**	U.S. • 26-2-0 (14 KOs)
9	**SEBASTIAN HERNANDEZ**	Mexico • 20-0-0 (18 KOs)
10	**SUBARU MURATA**	Japan • 10-0-0 (10 KOs)

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 POUNDS

C	**JUNTO NAKATANI** ◆◆◆	Japan • 31-0-0 (24 KOs)
1	**SEIYA TSUTSUMI** ◆	Japan • 12-0-3 (8 KOs)
2	**YOSHIKI TAKEI** ◆	Japan • 11-0-0 (9 KOs)
3	**RYOSUKE NISHIDA**	Japan • 10-1-0 (2 KOs)
4	**TAKUMA INOUE**	Japan • 20-2-0 (5 KOs)
5	**DAIGO HIGA**	Japan • 21-3-3 (19 KOs)
6	▲+4 **ANTONIO VARGAS**	U.S. • 19-1-1 (11 KOs)
7	▼-1 **TENSHIN NASUKAWA**	Japan • 7-0-0 (2 KOs)
8	▼-1 **JASON MOLONEY**	Australia • 27-4-0 (19 KOs)
9	▼-1 **JEYVIER CINTRON**	Puerto Rico • 13-1-0 (6 KOs)
10	▼-1 **KENNETH LLOVER**	Philippines • 15-0-0 (10 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 POUNDS

C	**JESSE RODRIGUEZ** ◆◆◆	U.S. • 22-0-0 (15 KOs)
1	**FERNANDO MARTINEZ** ◆	Argentina • 18-0-0 (9 KOs)
2	**KAZUTO IOKA**	Japan • 31-4-1 (16 KOs)
3	**CARLOS CUADRAS**	Mexico • 44-5-1 (28 KOs)
4	**DAVID JIMENEZ**	Costa Rica • 18-1-0 (12 KOs)
5	**PHUMELELE CAFU**	S. Africa • 11-1-3 (8 KOs)
6	**ANDREW MOLONEY**	Australia • 27-4-0 (17 KOs)
7	**PEDRO GUEVARA**	Mexico • 43-5-1 (22 KOs)
8	▲+1 **RICARDO MALAJIKA**	S. Africa • 16-2-0 (12 KOs)
9	▼-1 **WILLIBALDO GARCIA**	Mexico • 23-6-2 (13 KOs)
10	**RENE CALIXTO BIBIANO**	Mexico • 23-1-1 (9 KOs)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 POUNDS

C	(VACANT)	
1	▲+4 **RICARDO SANDOVAL** ◆◆	U.S. • 27-2-0 (18 KOs)
2	▼-1 **KENSHIRO TERAJI**	Japan • 25-2-0 (16 KOs)
3	▼-1 **SEIGO YURI AKUI**	Japan • 21-3-1 (11 KOs)
4	▼-1 **MASAMICHI YABUKI** ◆	Japan • 18-4-0 (17 KOs)
5	▼-1 **GALAL YAFAI**	U.K. • 9-1-0 (7 KOs)
6	**ANGEL AYALA**	Mexico • 18-1-0 (8 KOs)
7	**FELIX ALVARADO**	Nicaragua • 42-4-0 (35 KOs)
8	**ANTHONY OLASCUAGA** ◆	U.S. • 9-1-0 (6 KOs)
9	**TOBIAS REYES**	Argentina • 17-1-1 (16 KOs)
10	**JUKIYA IIMURA**	Japan • 9-1-0 (2 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 POUNDS

C	(VACANT)	
1	▲+4 **CARLOS CANIZALES**	Venezuela • 28-3-1 (20 KOs)
2	▲+8 **KYOSUKE TAKAMI** ◆	Japan • 10-0-0 (8 KOs)
3	▼-2 **RENE SANTIAGO** ◆	Puerto Rico • 14-4-0 (9 KOs)
4	▼-2 **THANONGSAK SIMSRI**	Thailand • 39-1-0 (34 KOs)
5	▼-1 **SIVENATHI NONTSHINGA**	S. Africa • 13-2-0 (10 KOs)
6	▼-2 **SHOKICHI IWATA**	Japan • 14-2-0 (11 KOs)
7	▼-1 **REGIE SUGANOB**	Philippines • 16-1-0 (6 KOs)
8	▼-1 **CRISTIAN ARANETA**	Philippines • 25-3-0 (20 KOs)
9	★ **ERIC BADILLO**	Mexico • 18-0-0 (8 KOs)
10	★ **PJAYSON VAYSON**	Philippines • 14-1-1 (8 KOs)

Saudia SKYTEAM

Fly Saudia
to the world

Richard Pelham

MEN'S RING RATINGS Through Aug. 30, 2025

CHAMPIONSHIP BELTS: ◆ RING ◆ IBF ◆ WBA ◆ WBC ◆ WBO | ★ NEW TO RATINGS

STRAWWEIGHTS

WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 POUNDS

C **OSCAR COLLAZO** ◆◆◆
U.S. • 12-0-0 (9 KOs)

1 **MELVIN JERUSALEM** ◆
Philippines • 24-3-0 (12 KOs)

2 **PEDRO TADURAN** ◆
Philippines • 18-4-1 (13 KOs)

3 **KNOCKOUT CP FRESHMART**
Thailand • 28-1-0 (11 KOs)

4 ▲+1 **SIYAKHOLWA KUSE**
S. Africa • 9-2-1 (4 KOs)

5 ▲+2 **YUNI TAKADA**
Japan • 16-8-3 (6 KOs)

6 ▲+2 **RYUSEI MATSUMOTO**
Japan • 6-0-0 (4 KOs)

7 ▲+2 **JOEY CANOY**
Philippines • 24-5-2 (15 KOs)

8 ▲+2 **VIC SALUDAR**
Philippines • 26-6-0 (16 KOs)

9 ★ **TAKESHI ISHII**
Japan • 10-1-0 (8 KOs)

10 ★ **BEAVEN SIBANDA**
Zimbabwe • 9-1-0 (3 KOs)

HOW OUR RATINGS ARE COMPILED

RECORDS PROVIDED BY BOXREC.COM

Championship vacancies can be filled in the following two ways: 1. The Ring's Nos. 1 and 2 contenders fight one another. 2. If the Nos. 1 and 2 contenders choose not to fight one another and No. 1 fights No. 3, that matchup could be for the Ring title if the Editorial Board deems No. 3 worthy.

A champion can lose their belt in six situations: 1. The Champion loses a fight in the weight class in which they are champion; 2. The Champion moves to another weight class; 3. The Champion does not schedule a fight in any weight class for 18 months, although injuries and certain other unforeseen circumstances could be taken into consideration; 4. The Champion does not schedule a fight at their championship weight for 18 months (even if they fight at another weight); 5. The Champion does not schedule a fight with a Top-5 contender from any weight class for two years; 6. The Champion retires.

The Ring Editorial Board considers input from the Ratings Panel of boxing journalists from around the world and then decides collectively what changes will be made. That applies to both the pound-for-pound and divisional ratings.

POUND FOR POUND LIST

MEN

1 **OLEKSANDR USYK**
Ukraine • 24-0-0 (15 KOs)

2 **NAOYA INOUE**
Japan • 30-0-0 (27 KOs)

3 **TERENCE CRAWFORD**
U.S. • 41-0-0 (31 KOs)

4 **DMITRY BIVOL**
Russia • 24-1-0 (12 KOs)

5 **ARTUR BETERBIEV**
Russia • 21-1-0 (20 KOs)

6 **JESSE RODRIGUEZ**
U.S. • 22-0-0 (15 KOs)

7 **JUNTO NAKATANI**
Japan • 31-0-0 (24 KOs)

8 **CANELO ALVAREZ**
Mexico • 63-2-2 (39 KOs)

9 **SHAKUR STEVENSON**
U.S. • 24-0-0 (11 KOs)

10 ★ **DAVID BENAVIDEZ**
U.S. • 30-0-0 (24 KOs)

David Benavidez re-entered the top 10 following Teraji's shock defeat.

WOMEN

1 **KATIE TAYLOR**
Ireland • 25-1-0 (6 KOs)

2 **CLARESSA SHIELDS**
U.S. • 17-0-0 (3 KOs)

3 **CHANTELLE CAMERON**
U.K. • 21-1-0 (8 KOs)

4 **AMANDA SERRANO**
Puerto Rico • 47-4-1 (31 KOs)

5 **DINA THORSLUND**
Denmark • 23-0-0 (9 KOs)

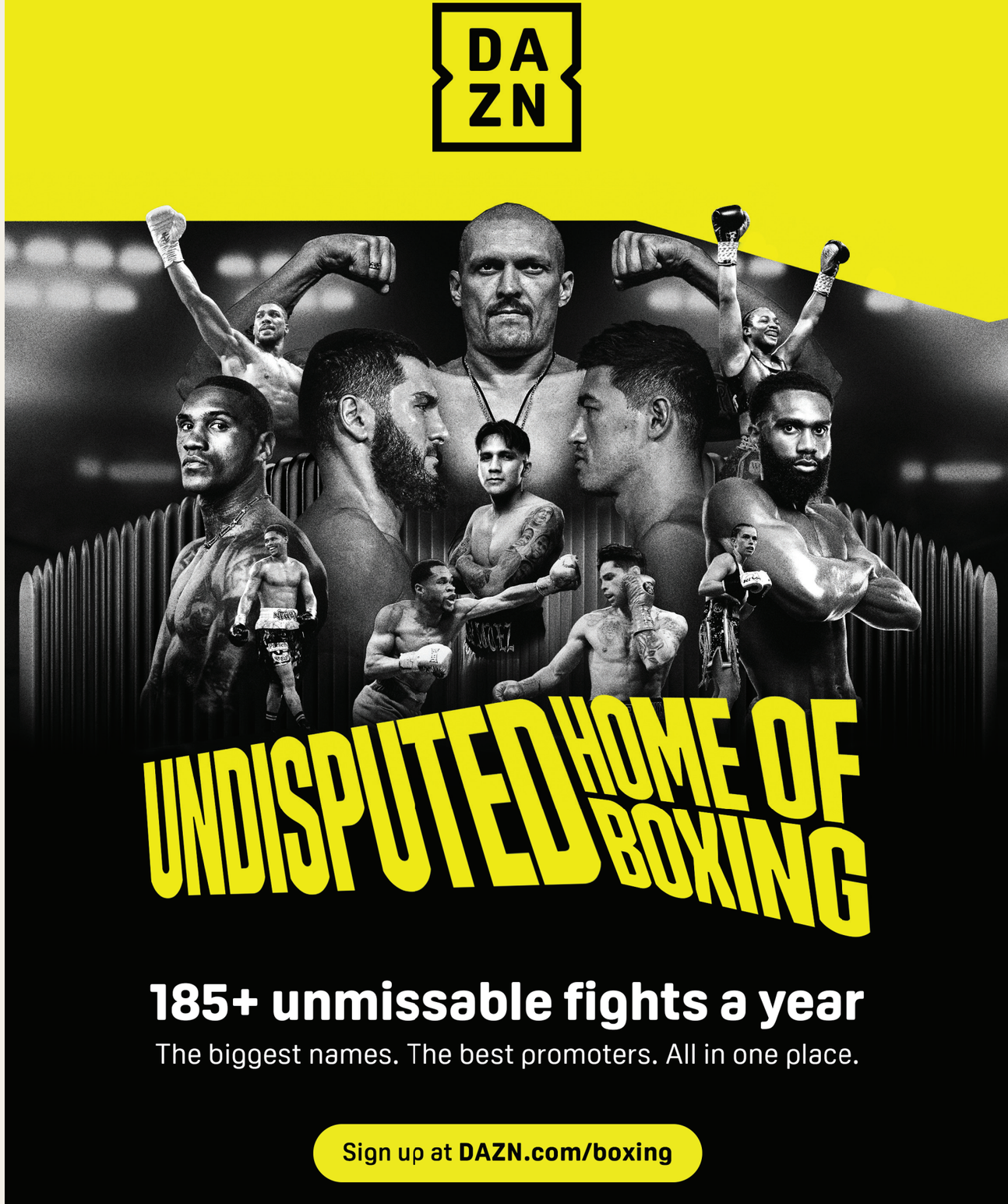
6 **GABRIELA FUNDORA**
U.S. • 16-0-0 (8 KOs)

7 **LAUREN PRICE**
U.K. • 9-0-0 (2 KOs)

8 **YOKASTA VALLE**
Costa Rica • 33-3-0 (10 KOs)

9 **MIKAELA MAYER**
U.S. • 21-2-0 (5 KOs)

10 **TINA RUPPRECHT**
Germany • 15-1-1 (3 KOs)



WOMEN'S RING RATINGS Through Aug. 30, 2025

CHAMPIONSHIP BELTS: ◆ RING ◆ IBF ◆ WBA ◆ WBC ◆ WBO | ★ NEW TO RATINGS

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 POUNDS

C SHADASIA GREEN ◆◆
U.S. • 16-1-0 (11 KOs)
1 FRANCHON CREWS-DEZURN ◆◆
U.S. • 10-2-0 (2 KOs)
2 SAVANNAH MARSHALL
U.K. • 13-2-0 (10 KOs)
3 LANI DANIELS
New Zealand • 11-3-2 (1 KO)
4 MARY CASAMASSA
U.S. • 6-1-0 (1 KO)
5 CITLALLI ORTIZ
Mexico • 4-2-0 (1 KO)

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 POUNDS

C (VACANT)
1 DESLEY ROBINSON ◆◆
Australia • 10-3-0 (3 KOs)
2 MELINDA WATPOOL
Canada • 7-1-0 (2 KOs)
3 MAPULE NGUBANE
S. Africa • 14-9-3 (3 KOs)
4 ADRIANA DOS SANTOS ARAUJO
Brazil • 6-3-0 (1 KO)
5 TAMM THIBEAULT
Canada • 3-0-0 (2 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 POUNDS

C. (VACANT)
1 OSHAE JONES ◆
U.S. • 9-0-0 (3 KOs)
2 CECILIA BRAEKHUS
Norway • 38-2-1 (9 KOs)
3 FEMKE HERMANS
Belgium • 18-5-0 (7 KOs)
4 MARY SPENCER ◆
Canada • 10-2-0 (6 KOs)
5 PRISCILLA PETERLE
France • 11-0-0 (3 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 POUNDS

C LAUREN PRICE ◆◆◆◆
U.K. • 9-0-0 (2 KO)
1 MIKAELA MAYER ◆
U.S. • 21-2-0 (5 KOs)
2 NATASHA JONAS
U.K. • 16-3-1 (9 KOs)
3 SANDY RYAN
U.K. • 7-3-1 (3 KOs)
4 MICHAELA KOTASKOVA
Czech Rep. • 11-0-2 (4 KOs)
5 STEPHANIE AQUINO
Puerto Rico • 8-0-0 (2 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 POUNDS

C KATIE TAYLOR ◆◆◆◆◆
Ireland • 25-1-0 (6 KOs)
1 CHANTELLE CAMERON
U.K. • 21-1-0 (8 KOs)
2 AMANDA SERRANO
Puerto Rico • 47-4-1 (31 KOs)
3 SAMANTHA WORTHINGTON
U.S. • 12-0-0 (7 KOs)
4 FLORA PILI
France • 11-0-0 (2 KOs)
5 ELIZABETH OSHOBA
Nigeria • 9-0-0 (5 KOs)

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 POUNDS

C. (VACANT)
1 CAROLINE DUBOIS ◆
U.K. • 11-0-1 (5 KOs)
2 BEATRIZ FERREIRA ◆
Brazil • 7-0-0 (2 KOs)
3 TERRI HARPER ◆
U.K. • 16-2-2 (6 KOs)
4 RHIANNON DIXON
U.K. • 10-1-0 (1 KO)
5 HOLLY HOLM
U.S. • 34-2-3 (9 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 POUNDS

C ALYCIA BAUMGARDNER ◆◆◆◆◆
U.S. • 16-1-0 (7 KOs)
1 LEILA BEAUDOIN
Canada • 13-1-0 (2 KOs)
2 DELFINE PERSOON
Belgium • 50-3-0 (20 KOs)
3 JENNIFER MIRANDA
Spain • 12-1-0 (1 KO)
4 MEA MOTU
New Zealand • 22-1-0 (9 KOs)
5 ★ ELIF NUR TURHAN
Turkiye • 10-0-0 (7 KOs)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 POUNDS

C AMANDA SERRANO ◆◆◆
Puerto Rico • 47-4-1 (31 KOs)
1 TIARA BROWN ◆
U.S. • 19-0-0 (11 KOs)
2 NINA MEINKE ◆
German • 20-3-0 (4 KOs)
3 SKYE NICOLSON
Australia • 14-1-0 (3 KOs)
4 SARAH MAHFOUD
Denmark • 15-2-0 (3 KOs)
5 DANIELA BERMUDEZ
Argentina • 32-6-3 (12 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 POUNDS

C ELLIE SCOTNEY ◆◆◆◆
U.K. • 11-0-0 (0 KOs)
1 YAMILETH MERCADO
Mexico • 24-4-0 (5 KOs)
2 SEGOLENE LEFEBVRE
France • 19-1-0 (1 KO)
3 MAYELLI FLORES ROSQUERO ◆
Mexico • 13-1-1 (4 KOs)
4 ERIKA CRUZ-HERNANDEZ
Mexico • 18-2-1 (4 KOs)
5 NAZARENA ROMERO
Argentina • 14-1-2 (8 KOs)

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 POUNDS

C DINA THORSLUND ◆◆◆
Denmark • 23-0-0 (9 KOs)
1 CHERNEKA JOHNSON ◆◆
Australia • 18-2-0 (8 KOs)
2 DIANA LAURA FERNANDEZ
Mexico • 35-4-1 (5 KOs)
3 SHURRETTA METCALF
U.S. • 14-5-1 (2 KOs)
4 FLORENCIA JUAREZ
Argentina • 13-1-0 (1 KO)
5 JOHANNA WONYOU
France • 12-0-0 (2 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 POUNDS

C MIZUKI HIRUTA ◆◆
Japan • 9-0-0 (2 KOs)
1 GINNY FUCHS
U.S. • 4-0-0 (1 KO)
2 ADELAIDA RUIZ
U.S. • 17-1-1 (8 KOs)
3 ASLEY GONZALEZ ◆
Mexico • 17-2-0 (7 KOs)
4 CARLA MERINO
Argentina • 16-3-0 (4 KOs)
5 EMMA DOLAN
U.K. • 8-0-0 (1 KO)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 POUNDS

C GABRIELA FUNDORA ◆◆◆◆◆
U.S. • 16-0-0 (8 KOs)
1 KENIA ENRIQUEZ
Mexico • 28-1-0 (11 KOs)
2 ARELY MUCINO
Mexico • 32-5-2 (11 KOs)
3 JASMINA ZAPOTOCZNA
U.K. • 9-1-0 (0 KOs)
4 MARILYN BADILLO AMAYA
Mexico • 19-1-1 (3 KOs)
5 ALEXAS KUBIKI
Canada • 13-1-0 (2 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 POUNDS

C (VACANT)
1 EVELIN BERMUDEZ ◆◆
Argentina • 21-1-1 (7 KOs)
2 KIM CLAVEL
Canada • 21-2-0 (3 KOs)
3 LOURDES JUAREZ ◆
Mexico • 38-4-0 (5 KOs)
4 GABRIELA ALANIZ
Argentina • 17-2-0 (7 KOS)
5 SARA BAILEY ◆
Canada • 6-0-0 (0 KOs)

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 POUNDS

C (VACANT)
1 YOKASTA VALLE ◆
Costa Rica • 33-3-0 (10 KOs)
2 SARAH BORMANN ◆
Germany • 20-1-0 (7 KOs)
3 YUKO KUROKI ◆
Japan • 25-8-2 (10 KOs)
4 SOL CUDOS ◆
Argentina • 10-0-2 (3 KOs)
5 SOL BAUMSTARH
Argentina • 13-7-1 (8 KOs)

ATOMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 102 POUNDS

C TINA RUPPRECHT ◆◆◆◆◆
Germany • 15-1-1 (3 KOs)
1 SUMIRE YAMANAKA
Japan • 8-1-0 (3 KOs)
2 ERI MATSUDA
Japan • 7-2-1 (1 KO)
3 ESNEIDY RODRIGUEZ OLMOS
Mexico • 10-0-1 (0 KOs)
4 CAMILA ZAMORANO
Mexico • 12-0-0 (1 KO)
5 NAO UGAWA
Japan • 6-0-0 (0 KOs)

CALLING THE SHOTS

ACCUSTOMED TO BEING AVOIDED BY THE ELITE, **DAVID BENAVIDEZ** FINALLY TAKES CENTER STAGE FOR THE HUGE RING IV CARD IN RIYADH

By Joseph Santoliquito

SYE WILLIAMS

David Benavidez is accustomed to being frozen out. At super middleweight, the unbeaten Arizona native campaigned endlessly for a matchup against Canelo Alvarez, only to be unapologetically ignored while the sport's biggest star feasted on other prey. Benavidez, who had two previous reigns as a WBC titleholder, stood as Canelo's No. 1 challenger for over two years.

Frustrated and with his 6-foot-2 frame crying out for a move up in weight, Benavidez finally accepted that his future lay at 175 pounds. Following showcase wins over Oleksandr Gvozdyk and David Morrell, the 28-year-old pressure fighter again became the WBC's No. 1 contender and was in pole position to challenge for all the light heavyweight marbles. Fate had other ideas.

The elite-level players in the division were – and remain – former Canelo conqueror Dmitry Bivol and the marauding Artur Beterbiev. Last October, Beterbiev outpointed Bivol in a classic battle, which crowned the first undisputed light heavyweight champ in two decades. Bivol would avenge that loss four months later in another close fight, leading fans to rightfully demand a rubber match.

Bivol's team was noncommittal when it came to negotiations for the Beterbiev decider, so he was eventually ordered by the WBC to face Benavidez. That fight didn't come close to transpiring, so "The Mexican Monster" was upgraded from interim WBC titleholder to full titleholder without throwing a punch. A warrior to his core, Benavidez desperately wanted to win that title in the ring.

Understandably embittered and eager to prove his superiority, Benavidez is now braced for his maiden title defense, which comes against explosive British power-puncher Anthony Yarde on November 22. That bout headlines the brilliant Ring IV card at the ANB Arena in Riyadh, so the two-weight titleholder – who has been hovering around the bottom of The Ring's pound-for-pound list since last year – has the perfect platform to display his formidable fighting skills.

SYE WILLIAMS

The Ring caught up with Benavidez (30-0, 24 KOs) as he looked forward to throwing down against Yarde in what is potentially a Fight of the Year contender.

The Ring: What would you consider your greatest asset as a fighter?

David Benavidez: I think my hunger for the sport and my work ethic sets me apart. I've been fighting for 11 years. I have not been the perfect fighter. I have not been in the best shape. I'll admit I haven't been the most athletic guy who stays in shape. Why am I still here? Why am I as dominant as I am? What keeps me going? I've stayed dedicated. I've stayed motivated. There is something that I want that money cannot buy. I want to be the greatest ever. I won't be satisfied until I am. I have made a lot of money. I don't care about the money. I don't care about the cars or the houses. I care about being the greatest of all time. That's why I'm different. Guys today don't think like that anymore.

"Why am I as dominant as I am? What keeps me going? I've stayed dedicated. I've stayed motivated. There is something that I want that money cannot buy. I want to be the greatest ever."

The Ring: When you were upgraded to "full" WBC light heavyweight titleholder, how did that make you feel?

DB: To be honest, the type of fighter that I am, I would rather take a world title from a champion or win it in a fight. But the way the situation was, I didn't mind getting the title this way, upgraded to champion. Me and my team did everything within our power to fight for the world title, and I was the number one contender for three years in every sanctioning body, and I never got the fight with Canelo Alvarez. It was three years of waiting for Canelo [at 168], and we were forced to go up to 175. I fought a great fighter in Oleksandr Gvozdyk and David Morrell. I did enough to get a title shot. I was the number one contender for the WBC and the fight wasn't going to happen with Dmitry Bivol, so the WBC elevated me to champion.

You know, I'm happy right now – happy because I'm in position to make great fights happen against great fighters because of the belt. That's what I am here for. I'm here to test my skills and give the fans what they want to see.

The Ring: Does having the WBC belt make it easier for you to get the Dmitry Bivol-Artur Beterbiev III winner in the ring?

DB: It does. Any fight with me is lucrative. It's for a world title. It's enough to entice anyone. Any champion or any fighter who is a number one contender, this will make it easier for me getting the fights I want and possibly make it easier for me to get that fight with Canelo. It's the fight everyone wants. It's going to be a subject that will be talked about until it happens. It's a fight that has to happen. Now Canelo says he's fighting for greatness. I have the WBC title. I'm going to beat all these fighters, and if he wants that shot at greatness, I'm going to be the one holding that belt against him.

The Ring: Do you foresee any roadblocks in facing the Bivol-Beterbiev III winner?

DB: I don't even think like that anymore, since I've had so many roadblocks already in my career. These big fights will eventually have to happen. If they don't, it shows that these fighters are scared of me. I don't have to say anything else. Everyone says that they can beat me in the ring. Well, then prove it. Get in the ring with me. Beterbiev and Bivol I feel are both honorable fighters, and I actually admire the fact Bivol is giving Beterbiev a rematch, because he is entitled to it. But I will be right there. The winner better give me the opportunity, because I've been in line for a long, long time and I'm tired of it.

The Ring: And if you don't get the Bivol-Beterbiev III winner?

DB: Plan B is a move to cruiserweight. Our plan, if that fight doesn't happen, we have a verbal agreement from Oscar De La Hoya and Golden Boy to fight [WBA/WBO cruiserweight titleholder Gilberto] "Zurdo" Ramirez. It could happen. I don't want to wait. I'm tired of waiting. I sparred Zurdo for years and I always got the better of him. But I'm in a good position here at light heavyweight. I want to be really dominant at 175. I see myself, with modern conditioning, fighting into my 40s.

The Ring: You are coming off an impressive victory over Morrell, so what were your thoughts when you saw his fight against Imam Khataev, who many thought beat Morrell?

DB: I thought Morrell was going to win easily. I beat the fight out of Morrell. He didn't look like the same fighter [against Khataev] that he did against me. The only thing I could say about Morrell is maybe he did not prepare enough. I thought Khataev won the fight. I thought it was a mistake that Morrell was given the victory. It was a good fight. Morrell got dropped. But he stepped it up in the last rounds and he could have finished [Khataev], but the judges got it wrong. Khataev won by two or three rounds.

The Ring: You have Anthony Yarde in your first title defense on a Riyadh Season event on November 22. What are some

of the things you feel he does well?

DB: Honestly, I think Anthony Yarde is a great fighter. I've been watching him before he fought [Sergey] Kovalev [in August 2019], because I knew in my head that one day I was going to fight him. He's a good fighter. He has good reflexes. He has good defense. He has good feints, good hooks. He's going to come to fight. I know exactly how he's going to come at me. So instead of being nervous, I know the amount of excitement I'm going to give the fans. This is going to be my big moment. I feel this is finally my moment in the big leagues, being on Riyadh Season. I've been training this whole time. I have had five months to prepare for this camp, and I feel like this is going to be the start of my career, to be honest with you. In the next five years, I want to say that I took over the game and I became the face of boxing. It's not going to be easy. There are a lot of fighters that I have to go through. Nothing in this life is easy. And I love challenges. It will be two warriors going to war. I won't step back.

The Ring: Do you think Yarde does anything that can hurt you?

DB: At this level, anything can hurt you. One wrong move, one wrong defense – all these fighters are good. It's why we are at this level. He's strong. He hurt Beterbiev a couple of times. Who am I to say with one good shot, I can't get hurt? I'll do everything in my power to do a lot of neck workouts to make sure I strengthen my chin as much as possible. Yarde is dangerous at every level. He has a lot of experience. He has power, and he's hungry. This is going to be his third attempt at a world title. It might be his last attempt. He will come with everything. I can't wait to showcase my skills.

The Ring: What do you feel your advantages are, going into that fight?

Benavidez steamrolled his way to a decision win over Caleb Plant.

DB: I can dominate him with my inside game. I have a great inside game. I can dominate him with the jab. I can dominate him with my speed. I can dominate him with my head movement. There are a lot of things that I do that opponents don't realize until they get into the ring with me. I beat David Morrell in every category – defense, offense, speed, power – and he didn't think that could happen. I am still learning a lot and am a student of the game. Everything I learn from each one of my fights goes into the next fight. Everyone is going to see a whole different animal against Yarde.

The Ring: It seems like there are some world-class fighters who think they have nothing left to learn.

DB: When fighters think like that, that's when they go downhill. I know for me, every single day I watch hours of boxing. I mean hours and hours. I pride myself on being a student of the game. I'm still in the learning process, trying to pick up as much as possible. I try to keep my mind sharp every single day. I have a lot of different boxers that I like to watch and that motivate me. I try something new every day, learning new skills. It's just me. I can't speak for other fighters. I know a lot of fighters are burnt out. I want to be the greatest of my generation, and to do that, I not only have to train hard, I have to study.

The Ring: Yarde has a history of fighting to the level of his opposition. What's your best approach against him?

DB: My best approach will be using a lot of the jab and keeping the distance. When I'm inside, rip the body. I have to be the same fighter I am. I've seen a lot of boxing styles, and I don't let anything overwhelm me. I know he will come at me trying to use a lot of power. He will come in looking for a big shot, but I have a lot of things to counter those. If he leaves himself too open, or one wrong move, I'm going to be there.

The Ring: How do you see the fight playing out?

DB: I'm not thinking about a knockout or anything. I'm going to go in there and try to hurt him every single round. I'm going in there to establish my game plan and establish my jab. I want to follow my game plan and keep shooting, keep shooting, keep shooting. If he falls, he falls. If he doesn't fall, you better believe that I am going to beat him clearly and decisively.

The Ring: Anything special you're working on for fight night?
DB: I'm working on a lot of stuff and working on a lot of new combinations right now. I want to use as much speed and combinations and try to be as exciting as I can be.

The Ring: That's a perfect segue to this question: Ring owner Turki Alalshikh has called for "no more Tom and Jerry-type boxing matches." What's your take on that?
DB: I think it's good. For fighters who run around in the ring, it can be concerning. For me, I'm going to be the same fighter I am. It doesn't change anything for me. I know fans like to see fighters fight, not run around all night.

The Ring: Does it frustrate you sitting ringside to see a "Tom and Jerry" fight?
DB: It does. But like I said, some fighters are just like that. They're scared. Not every single fighter is a warrior. You can tell when fighters are scared. That's not me. I know many people who say boxing is the "sweet science," and it is, but it's also a fight, too. Fans are paying a lot of money to see fights and they want to get their money's worth. For me, I'd rather go in there and show people why I am the baddest man on the planet instead of winning a fight by running all night. It's what I think. Not every fighter thinks the same.

The Ring: You're known for having an incredible engine. Can you take me through a training day with David Benavidez?
DB: I like to sleep in. I like to get a good night's sleep. I'll get up around 9:30. I'll go outside and pray for 10 minutes. Then I'll go to the gym and do 800 sit-ups and 800 reps with 15-pound weights. After that, I'll run for 45 minutes, then get in the sauna for 10 minutes, and after that, go home, eat, rest, wake up and go back to the gym for two to three hours of boxing. That's a day for me. I'm at the gym twice a day from 11 to around 1:30 in the first session, then go back from 3:30 to 5:30 or 6. I'll get my conditioning in first.

The Ring: Where does sparring fit in?
DB: I'll do that three days a week. Sparring every day puts wear and tear on the body. When I spar, I don't go easy. I try and mess my guys up.

The Ring: How much better is your diet?
DB: Far, far better. (laughs) I'm not fat anymore. (laughs) A lot of people mess their health up with poor nutrition. What's really changed for me in my training and in my boxing is the intake of water. I drink a gallon of water almost every single day. Having a gallon of water in your body reduces the salt, it flushes the salt away, making it easier to lose weight. I don't drink soda. I don't drink juice. I just drink water. The weight sheds itself. In the morning, I'll eat four eggs, then I'll work out. I'll have a four-ounce piece of fish with some rice, go train and have eight ounces of fish and a little more rice in the evening. It's what I do every day.

David Becker

The Mexican Monster gave Demetrius Andrade a savage beating.

The Ring: How big will you get between fights?
DB: I'll walk around at 205. I want to see if my body can get bigger, if I might fight one day at cruiserweight. I am training three and a half months, so I lose the weight gradually. I'm not killing myself to make weight.

The Ring: I've seen you with your children. How has fatherhood fit into all of this?
DB: I try to go to sleep every day at 11 so I can spend some time with the kids. My wife, Karina, is amazing. She takes a lot of weight off my shoulders. When I had my first son, I was away at camp for six months and that hurt me. I didn't want to be away from them for that long. I can afford a big house, and I have a big den where I sleep during training camp away from the kids. My kids – Anthony, Khloe and Gabriel – mean everything to me. It is important to find dad time. It's why I come home at around 7 and get to play with them. That gives me even more motivation.

The Ring: You've done a lot of growing up. This David Benavidez is light years from the David Benavidez of seven years ago. You have to be proud of yourself.
DB: I am. I have a picture of me when I was 13, when I was this 5-foot-5, 260-pound fat kid. Every time I see that fat kid, that's what gets me through with the passion to succeed every day. That fat kid took a lot of grief. That fat kid heard he would never be good. It's why I carry a picture in my mind of the fat kid. That fat kid had it figured in his head, and he wanted to be the best in the world.

The Ring: You lost yourself a little there with some drugs in the past. What saved you?
DB: I grew up in Phoenix, Arizona, and had a lot of friends who were drug dealers and alcoholics. Those were the people I was around in 2018. I was broken down so much, I had to change. I was broken down to the point where I didn't know what to do. I wasn't doing well. I had to find God and my spirituality. If I didn't go through that mess, I wouldn't be where I am now. Everyone learns at different stages of their lives. I'm a completely different person than I was. I was never addicted to drugs or alcohol. I used it casually. It's why I was able to walk away. I would have punched the younger version in the face. My younger version would have punched back. (laughs) I won't dwell on the mistakes I made. I didn't lose myself completely. I've been sober for the last eight years. Boxing and my family saved my life. RING

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Norman's win over Jin Sasaki will be a prime candidate for Knockout of the Year.

SOMETHING TO SAY

ATLANTA FIGHTER **BRIAN NORMAN JR.** IS HARNESSING A FORMIDABLE MIX OF POWER, SPEED, RING IQ AND HOMETOWN PRIDE AS HE PREPARES FOR A POTENTIAL CAREER BREAKOUT AGAINST DEVIN HANEY

By Corey Erdman

Naoki Fukuda

Naoki Fukuda

Norman will be defending his WBO welterweight title against Devin Haney in Riyadh.

Five years before Brian Norman Jr. was born, Big Boi and Andre 3000 of OutKast stood on stage at the Source Awards to accept their award for Best New Artist (Group) and delivered a rallying cry for anyone below the Mason-Dixon Line.

"It's like we got a demo tape and don't nobody wanna hear it," said Andre 3000. "The South's got something to say."

For OutKast, it was a plea – or better yet, a demand – to the music industry to take them and southern hip-hop in general seriously. An insistence that the musical landscape was more than just the east and west coasts. A pushback against the assumption that rappers from southern states were "too country," unsophisticated, untalented. It's a moment of defiance that resonates with Norman, who wasn't even born yet but entered the world in Atlanta immediately inheriting a kinship to his city's hip-hop heroes.

Norman sees his story as a true parallel to theirs.

"Everybody doubted them, everybody said they ain't gonna do this and do that. Like, even when they won an award, they were still booing them on out," said Norman. "So why y'all booing me? That's how I feel about it."

Broadly speaking, Atlanta isn't viewed as a boxing hotbed, with world-famous gyms mostly located in the eastern U.S. in New York or the west in Los Angeles and Las Vegas, where the bulk of the boxing intelligentsia resides as well. Like OutKast, Norman has had the backing of an industry powerhouse – they were produced by Babyface and L.A. Reid; he's promoted by Top Rank – but until recently, it wasn't enough to afford him the kind of anticipatory hype many of his contemporaries enjoyed.

Norman has likened his fights, and in particular his highlight-reel finishes, to "mixtapes," little slices of media that serve to keep the public satiated and get them excited for a big project to come. In particular, his bloody beatdown of Giovani Santillan in 2024 and his Knockout of the Year candidate over Jin Sasaki in Japan reaffirmed the belief of those already in The Assassin's fan base that he is the best welterweight in the world. Those stoppages certainly helped create a few more fans as well.

Now the WBO titleholder prepares to drop what he hopes will be his first mainstream hit single, a November 22 showdown with multi-division champion Devin Haney at the ANB Arena in Riyadh as part of the blockbuster Ring IV event.

"Everybody got a rhythm with boxing, just like everybody got to be on rhythm with rapping as well. We're all solo. There's so many rappers out there that we don't know about, just like there's so many boxers out there that we don't know about. But some make it out, some don't. It's the same. It literally is that same. We all independent artists. Think about it," said Norman from his gym in Forest Park, a part of metro Atlanta. "In boxing and in rapping, in the industry, we all do that thing. Finding your speed, finding your tempo, finding your rhythm, finding your fan base and push it, push it, push it. And that's why I keep on dropping these mixtapes. And guess what? My fan base loves it. I've gone double platinum."

The Sasaki knockout in particular has gone double platinum in terms of internet virality. Norman traveled to Tokyo to battle Sasaki on his home turf and crushed the charismatic Japanese contender's would-be celebration with a knockout as frightening and picturesque as one will see in high-level boxing.

"I TRUST MY DEFENSE, I TRUST MY CHIN, I TRUST MY CONDITIONING AND I TRUST THE FACT THAT I WILL LAND THAT SHOT AND IT WILL PUT YOU DOWN."

Norman landed a sweeping left hook that rendered Sasaki unconscious and situated directly upon the center ring sponsorship logo, motionless for an uncomfortably long time. Sasaki revealed the next day that he'd lost memory of the last month and a half.

To produce a knockout that sensational, it requires a gargantuan level of power, of course, but there are plenty of hammer-fisted fighters who haven't scored KOs that look like *that*. Norman admits that he was actively looking for the perfect shot to produce something that would live in his Instagram reels forever. Doing that requires an elite level of ring IQ – preparation, anticipation and instinct.

"He kept jabbing to the body. He kept lifting his head up and standing straight up right there. I said 'OK, do it again,'" Norman reminisced. "I kept seeing that he kept imitating me. Like, even at the fight week, he was trying to do everything I was doing, like, 'OK, he's gonna try to constantly do everything I do.'

"I said, '[I'll] throw a jab to the body so he'll throw one.' That's the only way I threw it. I knew he was gonna go back to it, but he ain't thrown it in a minute. I threw it down there, and, sure enough, he did too. I was on the inside. You probably couldn't tell, but the left hook came right after that.

"And here we are. History was made."

At first glance, Norman's record (22 knockouts in 28 wins) may depict him as simply a pure powerhouse or a volume puncher. During his ascent through the ranks, that was often the scouting report on him. Indeed, a lot of Norman's work gets done on the inside the way a sheer brute might operate, but the work Norman is doing at close proximity isn't always physical. Against Sasaki, Norman's output peaked at 78 punches in a single round but averaged out just south of 65, which is high but not otherworldly when compared to other fighters. A lot of what Norman is doing on the inside is research work, an exercise in patience rather than relentlessness. Norman isn't just country strong; he's whip-smart, too.

"When we're fighting back and forth, that's my specialty, because most people, they get crazy. They go crazy. You know, they get too anxious, too hyped-up. Their energy is too high," said Norman. "For me, the whole time, I'm chilling on the inside. Throw all the punches you want, I'm just looking at you. I'm cool. And guess what? I'm going to find my little spot, and I'm going to touch it. That's it. I trust my defense, I trust my chin, I trust my conditioning and I trust the fact that I will land that shot and it will put you down. And if it does not put you down, I know it will sting you a little bit and make you think twice."

Norman's fusion of inside fighting and reactionary counterpunching can likely be traced back to his first and still-favorite reference point in boxing: Roy Jones Jr. Jones was the first fighter Norman fell in love with as a fan, and while he also extracted influence from Mike Tyson and Marvelous Marvin Hagler, Jones is forever "his dawg."

There's one particular move Norman likes to use, not dissimilar to the one that flattened Sasaki: He will throw away a right hand never meant to land, only to distract his opponent and to help Norman rotate his body before leaping in with a left hook. It's a sequence that seems lifted right out of a Jones highlight reel, like a sample of a famous tune borrowed to make a new classic track – like Willie Hutch's "I Choose You" becoming "Int'l Players Anthem" as Andre 3000 drops an all-timer of a verse.

It's a technique that became even more potent, Norman says, in 2023 as he recovered from a right-hand injury and could only use his left in training for a period of time. Not only did it give Norman time to strengthen his left hook exclusively, but he says it also helped him learn to throw it more effectively without the trigger and decoy of the right hand, enabling him to throw the shot even faster and with even less of a setup if he wanted to.

In other words, he felt an uptick in power, but the real blessing of those one-handed weeks was the boost to his timing.

"My timing is my specialty. People think it's my power, but my timing is real deal my specialty. Once again, I like

to fight right down the inside. I trust my timing. I know I'm going to see that shot," said Norman. "And it's even easier on the outside. That's how I look at it.

"Also, people don't realize I really got some long arms, and I'm also faster than what you think I was. You think it's just power. It's not. It's about the timing, speed, power, technique. Everything. And then foot placement. Like people are trying to say I don't move my head enough in my last fight. But go watch the fight. Go watch my feet. Those are small steps I was taking. Small steps. Look, that's all you need. People saying move your head, but I move my whole body off the line, not just my head. So it's all about the small steps, small things. People think it's quantity over quality. I like quality work."

Norman emphatically stopped Derrieck Cuevas on the Mayer-Ryan 2 card in Las Vegas.

Steve Marcus

The adherence to quality over quantity has been instilled by his father and trainer, Brian Norman Sr., the fighter he learned to imitate long before Jones or Tyson or Hagler. The elder Norman, also known as The Assassin, was an 18-11 pro at super middleweight and light heavyweight, locking horns with the likes of Jean Pascal and Edwin Rodriguez. Norman Sr. is just 46 years old, meaning his son was plenty cognizant during the majority of his fighting career, literally growing up in the gym.

Growing up in the gym doesn't necessarily make someone a natural talent, though, especially not in the discerning eyes of an active pro fighter. That said, it didn't take long for both father and son to determine that there would be an Assassin II who would surpass his pops' success in the ring. When you ask them when that moment was, the response is immediate and definitive:

"December 4th, 2014," they both answer simultaneously.

It was during a 15-round sparring session, when Norman Jr. was 14 years old, that he and his father realized he had something special. In that moment, Norman Jr. finally felt like he could let loose, and everything started to click.

"This guy used to get the best of me, every single time," said Norman. "Then that day, I said, 'Lemme just try.' That's all I did; I just tried. For 15 minutes straight, from corner to corner, post to post, I was giving this dude the business. Literally just the day before, he was getting the best of me, and then literally just like that, with the snap of a finger, it's all over."

"I had been telling him things. I had been trying to explain things, and then you just finally get it," said Norman Sr. of the paradigm shift. "He just got it. I'm like, 'Yes, you're locking in to what I've been telling you.'"

A few years later, a still-teenage Norman was sparring Gervonta Davis, fresh off his title-winning effort against Jose Pedraza, and feeling as though he held his own. "We were going back and forth," said Norman "I'm going back and forth with a world champion. That stuck out to me a whole lot."

In addition to Davis, Norman has had highly publicized sparring sessions with Terence Crawford that served as confidence builders, but it's the session in the home gym in the suffocating Georgia heat that both father and son draw upon as confirmation that he has *it*. It speaks to what is most meaningful to the Normans – their hometown, but also their solitude. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Norman hasn't spent a ton of time bouncing around training camps, rubbing shoulders with fellow contenders. Rather, he and his father have committed to a homegrown approach, not unlike OutKast and their basement recording studio known as "The Dungeon," 12 miles north of the Normans' gym.

"We're really loners; you understand what I'm saying? We've never been really part of the crowd," said Norman Sr., while his son offers more practical reasoning for their independent approach:

"Let me tell you why that is," said Norman Jr. "I don't wanna get cool with nobody. I gotta fight all these guys. I gotta fight each and every last one of them. I ain't cool with nobody. I don't want to be cool."

The Normans are certainly not cool with the Haneys, with whom a war of words began back in June of this year, ultimately leading to a tantalizing but somewhat surprising matchup between two of the sport's young stars. A battle between a powerful, offensively gifted fighter and a more experienced, defensively stifling boxer. Although Haney's scary moments against Ryan Garcia are fresh in everyone's minds (as well as the controversy due to Garcia's positive drug test, resulting in Haney's initial loss being changed to a "no contest"), overall, Haney is one of the trickiest fighters in the sport to hit, statistically. According to CompuBox, Haney is in the top 10 of champion-caliber fighters in terms of fewest punches absorbed per round and lowest in opponents' connect percentage.

While Norman Sr. acknowledges the gravity of the fight and the skill level of their opponent, he doesn't see strategizing for Haney as being particularly complex.

"He's a great fighter. He's been doing what he's been doing, but it was harder for me to watch Jin Sasaki," said Norman Sr. "I know that sounds crazy. It was harder for me to watch Jin Sasaki, Giovani Santillan, Derrieck Cuevas, because there were certain things I had to break down and I had to understand. With Devin Haney, I can understand it clearly, and I can understand it the first time.

"What I understand is he has a very sizable advantage on every single opponent. The very first jab to the head he threw [against Garcia], he got hooked. Because he was in range. He was in range and he was hurt by a person with the exact same dimensions as him. A person that could reach him that he did not have the size advantage over. So to me, it's not hard to see. I honestly see this as an easier breakdown."

Though Norman is already a world titleholder, just like OutKast was already succeeding on the charts as they stepped on stage at the Paramount Theatre in New York in '95, there's still a broader audience yet to discover or appreciate him. Perhaps potential fans are resistant because of the lack of a co-sign from famous camp mates, or because he's not training at Gleason's or Wild Card. Or maybe they think he's simply a one-note fighter, a guy with a rocket of a left hook but a lack of depth ready to be neutralized.

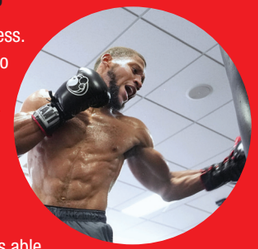
This fight, then, is the Normans' act of defiance, a chance to say what they have to say, for everyone to hear their mixtape.

"No matter how big we may get – quote unquote how big – we still know where we come from," explained Norman Jr. "We still know where we at. It's something better than us. We ain't going back; it's as simple as that. We ain't going back. We been down there before. Nothing was ever given to us. So the work ethic is straight-up different, because we afraid to be back there. We not going for that." RING

THE VILLAIN II MIXTAPE

Curated by trainer and cutman Jessy Ross Thompson, who has worked with 10 Olympians and cornered for contenders such as Radivoje Kalajdzic, Artur Ziyatdinov and Trevor McCumby.

"Watch for the Hook"



His hook is powerful, yet effortless. And the main reason he's able to fire it with such ease is that if you watch him carefully, similar to many American fighters, [he] will get square purposely or dip [his] head to the left. Floyd Mayweather was an expert at doing so. By getting square, he's able to shoot his lead left hook off of a defensive reaction or feint. He goes square a lot and keeps opponents wondering if he will shoot it.

"The Way You Move"

His footwork is simple, but most importantly he's calm and confident with it. He knows how to adjust, consistently playing with his body weight going from right foot to left. Being so powerful, he's developed this to be part of his feint game. That being said, I think he will need to be quicker with Haney. I don't think his footwork – calm, small footwork – will be good against Haney. I think he will need to mix his footwork speed in order to break Haney's distance to land significant power.

"So Fresh, So Clean"

Accuracy and feints. That's the biggest attribute he's developed in the last few fights, and this will help him tremendously with Haney. He's more patient now. More confident. Doesn't feel rushed. He doesn't feel like he needs to go hard right away. He's learned to change his speeds.

Naoki Fukuda

TAKING THE LEAD

FERNANDO MARTINEZ

SEES HIS UPCOMING CHAMPIONSHIP FIGHT AGAINST BAM RODRIGUEZ AS THE GATEWAY TO A PLACE IN THE PANTHEON OF LEGENDARY ARGENTINE FIGHTERS

By Diego Morilla

Martinez nails former four-weight titleholder Kazuto Ioka.

Tango dancing famously requires the presence of two performers to take place. The overused comparison sits only behind gladiator and bullfighting metaphors in describing the drama of two boxers clashing in the ring.

Each analogy has its place in human confrontation, but the significance of tango is that one party always leads and the other one follows.

And Fernando Martinez knows quite well what role he plays in the cruel dance of the squared circle.

"I adapt to any situation but always like being the one who applies the pressure," said Martinez, 34, during a halt in his training for his next fight. "I never ran away from a good war."

The current WBA junior bantamweight titlist will be facing Ring/WBC/WBO champion Jesse "Bam" Rodriguez as part of the Ring IV card on November 22 in Riyadh, and a war is exactly what is expected. Wars are what Martinez has provided in most of his 18 career bouts so far, but especially in the five title clashes he's seen.

It took a warlike performance to wrest the IBF belt from long-reigning Filipino titleholder Jerwin Ancajas back in 2022. Facing a once-beaten champ attempting to make the 11th defense of his belt in Las Vegas was considered a bridge too far for a fighter with a 13-0 record and only a couple of fights outside of Argentina. There were low expectations for Martinez. His complete dominance in winning a wide unanimous decision was a surprise even to the most seasoned observers and left no doubts about his talent and potential.

As clear as his victory was, the shock of the upset reverberated loudly enough to warrant a rematch seven and a half months later. Martinez reasserted himself with an even more definitive win on the scorecards, setting the stage for his next title defense.

Martinez carries the confidence of an unbeaten world titleholder.

With national pride on the line, another Filipino fighter stepped up to avenge the fallen champion. But with Martinez's confidence exploding while hitting his stride in the division, unbeaten challenger Jade Bornea was no match for the newly crowned titleholder and succumbed after 11 rounds of action.

Those performances led Martinez to his next challenge, this time in Japan.

Much like Ancajas before him, Kazuto Ioka was also a formidable foe with over 30 fights to his credit and an ample resume as a four-division titleholder who enjoyed perennial pound-for-pound consideration. His 8-1-1 record in junior bantamweight title bouts included wins over Francisco Rodriguez, Donnie Nietes, Joshua Franco and Kosei Tanaka. A title unification involving his WBA belt and Martinez's IBF trinket in Japan was widely seen as the absent line in Ioka's pound-for-pound membership application form.

But there was a missing piece in this seemingly perfect puzzle. Martinez is a throwback to the golden age of great Argentine flyweights: aggressive, talented, always in shape and throwing punches nonstop. And the comparisons with predecessors such as Pascual Perez and Horacio Accavallo don't end there. Those two legends were the first two boxing champions in Argentine history, and both of them (as well as a third, the brilliant Nicolino Locche) earned their titles in mild upsets in Japan.

Martinez, talented as he is, dug for additional mojo in the inspiration of being an Argentine junior bantamweight facing a local hero in the Land of the Rising Sun. And he delivered in style. In a brilliant tactical and physical fight, Martinez piled up points early and closed the deal with enough strength to score the biggest win in his career thus far, earning a direct rematch in the process.

Stunned by the loss in his homeland, Ioka trained hard for a career-defining second fight, but Martinez hit a bump in the road when he showed up in Japan with flu-like symptoms that never receded, and the fight had to be called off. A few months later, the postponed bout finally took place.

This time, Martinez was more cautious and Ioka much more conscious of the challenge in front of him. The fight was considerably closer than the first one, but Martinez managed to emerge victorious despite being floored in Round 10.

The win put him on his path to a unification bout with one of the most formidable active fighters in the world.

"With Ioka, we mixed it up because none of us wanted to give an inch," said Martinez. "With Bam, something similar may happen, but I believe he will want to put together a more technical performance. But if he stands his ground and fights, then we'll meet him there."

> "I adapt to any situation but always like being the one who applies the pressure."

Most analysts will agree that this is easier said than done, especially against a fighter with such a similar style and who is rapidly outgrowing the division, both in terms of talent and physical frame. Rodriguez didn't simply roll up to this challenge by happenstance.

Both fighters started their careers with great expectations after very solid amateur careers. There is an 18% difference in knockout ratios (50% for Martinez, 68% for Rodriguez) but Rodriguez had four more bouts against less-than-stellar opposition earlier in his career while Martinez appeared to jump right into the deep end of the pool – and abroad, to boot. The nine-year age gap between them (25 for Bam, 34 for Martinez) is significant, but so is the youth vs. experience factor: Martinez is 7-0 in fights abroad while this will be Rodriguez's first major fight on foreign soil (three of his first four pro fights were in Mexico), which always carries its own set of challenges.

Martinez sees advantages in other variables that may not be accounted for in stats. And he hopes to make the most out of those.

"Bam is fast, has great timing and knows how to capitalize on other fighters' mistakes," said Martinez. "But he also leaves those spaces and stands still for longer than he should. Stylistically we are different. He likes to wait and work in spurts. I am more constant. I go all in and keep the pressure on all the time. I think this will be my biggest advantage."

A native of La Boca, one of Buenos Aires' most iconic neighborhoods, Martinez keeps his old training habits intact. He routinely trains in the upper floor of the local fire station and jogs early in the morning in the scenic Lezama Park only a few blocks away from his childhood home. But he quickly dispels the notion that staying surrounded by family could affect his concentration.

"Our weight is going great; we're handling it right. I am strong, full of energy, and I know I will make the weight," claimed Martinez. "This time, we did a lot of things differently. We did some more specific work to achieve more strength and speed, watching our recovery time and focusing on the details suited specifically for the opponent. We had a more complete training camp than ever, and we are only thinking about winning."

With his last six fights taking place outside of Argentina, Martinez knows that a big win could put him on a path to a homecoming bout in the near future, and that's always a huge motivation for him. He is a huge fan of the fabled Boca Juniors soccer team, having grown up in the shadow of their massive stadium, La Bombonera. Having a triumphant return to his homeland to defend his belts in that venerable venue is a lifelong goal for Martinez, part of a family of over a dozen siblings living in the near-squalor conditions of the old "conventillos," the huge boarding houses where Italian immigrants huddled together in small rooms as they streamed off the boats. The multi-colored wood-and-tin homes in the area are a reminder of those times, when workers built their houses with the scrap wood they could salvage

after working in the local shipyards and then decorated them with the last few drops of paint at the bottom of cans they found at their jobs. La Boca is more than home to Martinez; it's his muse, and it's the place where he had to earn his stripes in fistfights in the street and even trying to fend off people trying to evict him from his home on Olavarría Street.

It is also the place where his father, Abel, introduced him to boxing at a young age, and the same place where "El Puma" (not the more commonly ascribed "Pumita," as he has frowned upon the use of that diminutive since winning his title) swore to honor his legacy by becoming world champion one day. Now, before and after each fight, he strikes a half-squatting, crossed-arm pose, making sure to display his left triceps and the large tattoo that features the name of his late dad, who passed away in 2014 after a lengthy battle with cancer.

"He is always with me," said Martinez, who can hardly speak about his family without becoming intensely emotional. "He is always present. Everything I do is for him, for my mom and for my family. All I want is for them to do well, and that's what keeps me fighting."

La Boca, of course, is also the birthplace of tango music, a style born out of a dozen different influences from all over the world. It is said there is a tango lyric for every moment in life, and Martinez's life story is eerily told in a tango that seems to describe his upbringing even though it was written decades before his birth: "I was born in a conventillo in Olavarría Street/lulled to sleep by the harmony/of a symphony of knives." Far from attempting to escape the dangers of life in the hood, Martinez embraces it as part of his heritage and also as an essential trait of his fighting style, the same style that he hopes will carry him to an epic victory worthy of being mentioned among the greatest ones of his country.

Unrivaled experience came with two triumphs over Ioka.

"I know I can achieve what Pascual Perez, Accavallo and Locche [did]," said Martinez, always obsessed with the idea of carving his own likeness onto the face of the Argentine Mount Rushmore of boxing. "There will be a new unified champion, Puma Martinez, on November 22."

In the daunting task of taking on a pound-for-pound talent, Martinez finds inspiration not only in his father, but also in his manager/promoter. Martinez's career is handled by countryman and former junior welterweight titlist Marcos "Chino" Maidana, himself a veteran of not one but two high-profile bouts against a top pound-for-pound fighter in Floyd Mayweather Jr.

In fight one, Maidana came close to dethroning not only the best in his division but in all of the sport of boxing, and Martinez knows how to draw lessons from that failed campaign.

"To me, this is not pressure, it's motivation," said Martinez. "I know what it means to beat a guy like this and what it could mean to my country and my career. I live for these challenges. I wake up every morning thinking about glory. I don't care about all the sacrifices. All I want is to leave my name in history and for people to remember these fights forever."

The question of whether there is a tango to be written about his heroic feats remains to be seen, but Martinez is fully invested in taking the leading role in the tango to be danced on November 22 – and in the idea of leaving no stone unturned in his search for glory. And he knows that the dream of returning to his own neighborhood to spend the rest of his life as the local hero can only be sealed with a huge win against Rodriguez.

What will come next, he hopes, is a moment he has dreamed about all his life, of defending his belt at La Bombonera, the field of dreams of "half the country plus one," as the soccer-crazy Boca fans love to identify themselves.

"It is a dream that can definitely happen," said Martinez. "I am going to give the people of La Boca this moment of happiness. It will be a dream come true for me and my family. I want that fight, but I want all the other titles, too, and I am sure I will get them." RING

EL PANTEÓN

A win over a pound-for-pound entrant would likely put Martinez on his way to entering the Argentine pantheon of all-time greats. Here are a few of the fighters that Martinez would be joining should he pull off the upset against Rodriguez.

Pascual Perez

Olympic gold medalist in 1948, world champion in 1954, unbeaten for the first six years of his pro career, in which he made nine succcessful defenses of his flyweight championship. At no taller than five feet, the diminutive Perez had it all, and only the absence of weight classes below flyweight prevented him from being a multi-division champ. A true ring genius who left quite a high bar for those who followed.

Carlos Monzon

After three early losses in his learning years, Monzon crushed his foes to remain unbeaten for the remaining 13 years of his legendary career, a stretch of 80 fights that included back-to-back wins against fellow all-time greats Nino Benvenuti and Emile Griffith and setting a title defense record at middleweight. He shared The Ring's Fighter of the Year award with Muhammad Ali in 1972.

Nicolino Locche

"The Untouchable" was a defensive wizard who loved frustrating his foes to the point of exasperation with his punch-slipping ability and his soft (14 KOs in 136 fights, one of the lowest ratios in history) but very effective counterpunching skills. Even today, Locche, who held the Ring junior welterweight championship from 1968 to 1972, remains one of Argentina's most beloved boxers of all time.

Does "Puma" have what it takes to rank among Argentina's greats?

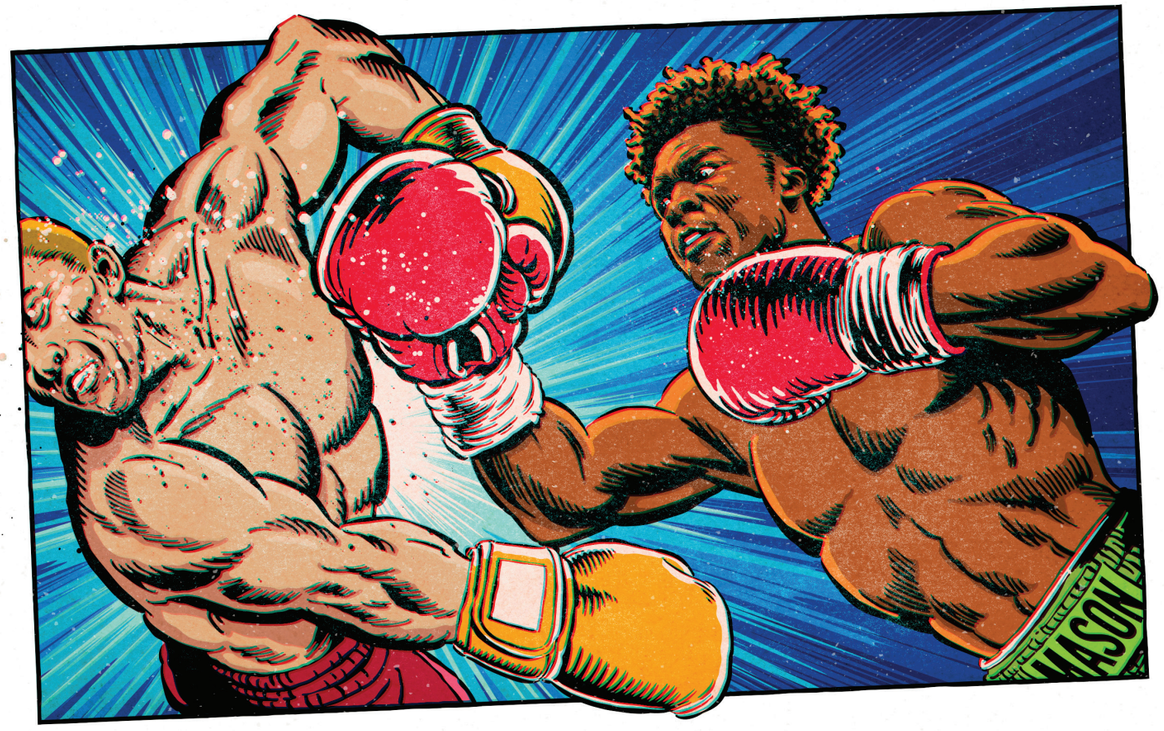
Victor Galindez

"The Leopard" was a broad-shouldered light heavyweight powerhouse who ruled the division in the 1970s. In his most memorable fight, he survived a 15-round clash against Richie Kates with blood pouring from a cut on his eyebrow to score an epic last-minute stoppage that remains Argentina's most memorable ring moment ever.

Sergio Martinez

A crafty middleweight southpaw with matinee-idol looks, Martinez built his career in Europe before holding titles at 154 and 160 (where he was Ring champion) while climbing all the way to the Top 3 in the pound-for-pound ratings, right behind Floyd Mayweather Jr. and Manny Pacquiao.

A STEP TOWARD ALL THE WAY



ABDULLAH MASON HAD A ROUGH NIGHT IN THE RING LAST YEAR, BUT IN PUSHING THROUGH IT HE LEARNED HE HAS THE STUFF OF CHAMPIONS

By Michael Rosenthal

Abdullah Mason doesn't want to get ahead of himself. The boxing world – and fans around the globe – are excited about the immense potential of the 21-year-old lightweight contender from Cleveland. He's excited, too. However, when he was asked what he thinks he can accomplish in the sport long-term, he responded with what sounded like a mantra: "Just one thing at a time."

A moment later, though, he answered the question in a different way.

"I have a fun fact for you," he told The Ring. "Do you know who Johnny Kilbane was? He was a fighter from Cleveland. He's in the Hall of Fame. And on the list of longest world title reigns [in one division] he's No. 2, after Joe Louis, more than 11 years.

"I like the idea of becoming world champion and breaking the record of longest reign by a fighter from Cleveland."

He'll get a chance to begin his own reign on November 22 in Riyadh, where he's scheduled to face Sam Noakes for the vacant WBO lightweight title on the highly anticipated Ring IV card.

Of course, Mason, whose body has yet to fill out, isn't likely to stay in any single weight class for more than a decade.

Mason (19-0, 17 KOs) walked into a neighborhood gym in Cleveland when he was 9 years old and, like his four boxing brothers, he never left. And from the moment he first exchanged punches with a sparring partner, the now-5-foot-9 southpaw knew this was what he was born to do, much to the consternation of his opponents over the years.

He was a reported 65-15 and a national junior champion as an amateur. That kind of success might've been a path to the Olympics. However, he was too young to compete in the 2020 Games and didn't want to wait until 2024. Thus, he signed a professional contract with Top Rank in 2021 at the tender age of 17.

He has dominated everyone placed in front of him since, including the one fight in which his mental strength was tested. He's one of those rare fighters about whom one could legitimately ask, "Where's his weakness?" He has natural gifts, including elite speed. He's a skillful boxer, thanks in good part to a talented trainer – his father, Valiant Mason. His 89% knockout ratio speaks for itself. The kid can crack.

And he appears to have the one ingredient that brings all of the above together: discipline. The first word Valiant Mason used when asked to describe his son was "focused." Neither the elder Mason nor Abdullah's Top Rank handlers see him losing that key to success.

"He's well-grounded," said Top Rank matchmaker Brad Goodman. "The father is an exceptional dad; he keeps all the brothers well-grounded. They're respectful. And they take no shortcuts. They treat boxing as the main thing in their lives.

"… The only thing I worry about a little is burnout, somebody at that age fighting consistently. It's not like he's going to fight five, six times a year, though. So he'll be OK."

The fight in which Mason had his mettle tested came last November, when he squared off with Dominican veteran Yohan Vasquez on the Keyshawn Davis-Gustavo Lemos card in Norfolk, Virginia. The rising young star ended up on his pants twice in the opening round, the result of clean left hooks.

Mason didn't appear to be hurt either time, but everyone watching had to be thinking the same thing at that moment: "Is Mason just another hot prospect about to go down in flames?" He responded to that notion with his actions, putting Vasquez on the canvas between his own knockdowns and stopping him the following round.

The kid, perhaps mature beyond his years, didn't panic for a moment. He just got back to work and got the job done, learning a valuable lesson in the process: His right hand needs to stay up.

"It was a turning point in my career," Mason said. "I think it took me to the next level. A lot of young fighters don't know how they'll react when something like that happens. My reaction, how things turned out, were all because of my preparation, my conditioning, my training.

"I stayed composed in there. That's something I know I've had, but that gave me a higher level of confidence. I know I can get out of any situation."

Or, as his father put it: "I think he gets it. He realizes now that it's not every fight that you eat your meal in one bite. That was a big step."

Goodman agrees.

"I wasn't worried one bit, even when he went down," he said. "They were stupid mistakes. He knew what he did wrong, being dropped twice by the same

A family affair: Mason pictured alongside his siblings and his father, Valiant.

ILLUSTRATION BY BUTCHER BILLY

Luis Lebron's corner threw in the towel to rescue him from Mason in Round 3.

punch. Now he's experienced that. He's seen certain things. That will make him a better fighter. Personally, I don't think he's going to make those mistakes again.

"... I have to say I'd like to see him concentrate on defense a little more, though. He's so offensive-minded; he's so good offensively. He just needs to sharpen up his defense a little."

Of course Mason has room for improvement. Again, he's only 21, an age when all fighters – even the best – are still developing.

And one could argue that the chance to fight for a world title came a little earlier than it should have. Mason was handed the opportunity after Davis was stripped of the belt because he missed weight for his defense against Edwin De Los Santos in June.

Mason happened to be ranked No. 1 by the sanctioning body, Noakes No. 2, which set up the fight in November. And make no mistake: Noakes (17-0, 15 KOs) is no pushover. The British 135-pound champion is a good, strong boxer with knockout power of his own.

That being said, Noakes could be the perfect opponent for Mason at this moment: solid but not near the class of lightweight superstars Gervonta Davis and Shakur Stevenson. The matchups against pound-for-pounders will come in time, assuming Mason continues to win his fights.

After all, he has had only two scheduled 10-round bouts and has only 59 pro rounds under his belt.

"He still has a ways to go," Goodman said. "He can beat the majority of [lightweight contenders] right now, but in another year, year and a half – even if he wins the title and defends once or twice – with more experience in 10- and 12-round bouts, he'll beat even more of the top lightweights.

"Is he the real deal? Yes. If he beats Noakes and then gets one or two of the right title defenses, he'll be on his way. His future remains to be seen. First things first, November 22."

Mason, too, wants to limit his focus to Noakes and the challenge ahead. When discussing the future, he shared only his knowledge of Kilbane's long reign and the fact he's gratified that fans have high expectations for him and like to watch him fight.

"I'm very excited about that," he said.

His father is comfortable taking a bolder stance when it comes to the young man's potential. He can attest to his son's commitment to the sport. He sees the support the brothers provide one another every day, which helps in development. He has witnessed firsthand 12 years of hard, consistent work in the gym. He sees the progress made every day. And he sees the results on fight night.

To him, that means Abdullah is in control of his own fate.

"This is just the beginning," Valiant Mason said. "It's gonna get even bigger. How far can he go? As far as he wants. He can do it all, he can do a little. It's all on him. Everything is there for him to do what he wants in the sport." RING

Sarah Stier

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THE SURVIVOR

Jimmy Clark was supposed to be on a flight with the rest of the U.S. amateur boxing team in 1980, but a twist of fate saved him from a horrific tragedy.

By Nigel Collins

On a recent summer afternoon, Jimmy Clark sat on the couch in the family home, deep in Pennsylvania's corn country. His son, James Jr., sat next to him, James's sister, Shakia, nearby. Clark is 70 years old now, still tall and slim, his face virtually unmarked. His close-crop stubble is mostly gray, his eyes mischievous. Jimmy had an admirable amateur and professional boxing career but is destined to be remembered for a day he would rather forget.

It was March 14, 1980, and it was snowing across the Eastern Seaboard as Clark, already running late, rushed to catch a plane that had already left without him.

"I was late like always, but that time it saved my life," said Clark. Was it luck or just a simple twist of fate? Jimmy smiled and said, "I'm blessed."

Clark, a heavyweight, was supposed to be the 15th member of the U.S. amateur boxing team flying to Europe for a series of exhibitions. President Jimmy Carter had boycotted the Moscow Olympics in response to the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan. The Euro trip was sort of a consolation prize, giving the boxers an opportunity to show off their skills and unleash some of the energy built up while training for the Olympics.

Due to the heavy snowstorm, Flight 007 was postponed two hours before taking off from New York's Kennedy International for the journey to Warsaw-Okecie Airport in Poland. The plane was a Soviet Ilyushin Il-62 jetliner with four rear-mounted engines, piloted by Captain Pawel Lipowczan, who had clocked nearly 9,000 flight hours.

There had been no problems during the nine-hour fight until the plane made its final approach. Suddenly it went into a deep dive and crashed into the ice-covered moat of a 19th-century military fortress. The plane was traveling at 240 miles per hour upon impact, and all 87 people aboard were killed. There were unsubstantiated reports that some of the boxers survived the crash and drowned in the moat. After an investigation, it was determined the reason for the crash was a faulty turbine shaft.

Fourteen young boxers had their lives snuffed out that day, innocent victims of a disaster.

Jimmy stared at a piece of paper with a list of the boxers who perished that day and was asked if he recognized any of the names.

"Kelvin Anderson, I knew him. Lonnie Young. I've heard that name," said Clark. "These were all wonderful guys. They deserve to be here, like I'm here. These are bad memories. I still don't like to talk about it much."

Jimmy's mindset was perfectly understandable, but out of respect for the boxers who died, here are their names, hometowns, and weight divisions in which they boxed: Kelvin Anderson, Hartford, Conn. (heavyweight); Elliott Chavis, U.S. Army, Fort Bragg, N.C. (light heavy); Walter Harris, San Francisco, Calif., (light heavy); Andrea McCoy, New Bedford, Mass., (light middle); Byron Payton, Troup, Texas (light middle); Chuck Robinson, Port Townsend, Wash. (light middle); Paul Palomino, Westminster, Calif. (welter); Lemuel Steeples, St. Louis, Mo. (light welter); Byron Lindsay, San Diego, Calif., (light welter); Gary Tyrone Clayton, Philadelphia, Pa. (light); Jerome Stewart, U.S. Navy, Norfolk, Va. (bantam); George Pimentel, Elmhurst, N.Y. (fly); Lonnie Young, Philadelphia, Pa. (fly); David Rodriguez, Pomona, Calif. (light fly).

Clark was not the only boxer who was scheduled to fly to Poland on Flight 007 but stayed at home. Heavyweight Tony Tucker had suffered a shoulder injury; Bobby Czyz broke his nose in a car accident; Marvis Frazier did not go because his father, Joe, "had a nightmare in which his family was engulfed in flame in an air crash. He refused to let Marvis go on that trip," said Frazier family spokesperson Sharon Hatch.

The boxers were not the only representatives of Team USA who lost their lives when Flight 007 plummeted out of the sky. Accompanying the boxers were eight noncombatants. They were: Joseph F. Bland, team manager; Col. Bernard Callahan, referee/judge; Thomas "Sarge" Johnson, head coach; John Radison, referee/judge; Junior Robles, assistant trainer; Steve Smigiel, interpreter; Ann Delores Gill Wesson; team assistant; and Dr. Ray Wesson, team physician.

I asked our little gathering about the sculpture that now stands in memorial to the ill-fated U.S. Team. Clark and his family were astounded to learn about the statue and had no idea it existed until that moment. Actually, there are two identical statues, one at the Warsaw Olympic Center and the other in the U.S. Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs. There is a high triangular plinth with a figure of a boxer struggling to get up on top. The sculptor is A. Thomas Schomberg.

"That's a wonderful thing," said Clark.

Not long after the boycott was announced, Clark received a handwritten letter from President Carter on Oval Office stationery explaining his reason for boycotting the Summer Games. There's a framed photo of the letter on the mantel, and the injection of politics into the conversation lightened the mood. Jimmy's shoutouts created a call-and-response that had everybody giggling.

"Didn't Carter have a brother who was an alcoholic?" said Jimmy.

"That was Billy Carter. He drank a lot of beer, but people liked him."

"What happened to Billy?"

"He's dead."

"He drank too much."

Jimmy was on a roll.

"What was the name of the governor who didn't like Black people?" said Jimmy.

"That was George Wallace, governor of Alabama."

"He drank too much."

Although he boxed out of an orthodox stance, Jimmy started another humorous discussion by claiming to be ambidextrous.

"I could use both hands," said Clark.

"He sure can eat with his left hand," said James Jr., an affable dig at his dad's dietary habits.

A memorial sculpture titled "Down but not Out ... Lost but not Forgotten."

The ambidextrous conundrum harkens back to a time when southpaws were considered poison due to their unconventional style and difficulty getting fights. When Jimmy began boxing in 1971, there were still trainers saying southpaws should be drowned at birth. Clark is naturally left-handed but was "turned around" by a trainer, a common practice back then that has fallen out of favor these days.

Clark was more comfortable talking about his own boxing career than the horror of Flight 007. A resident of Coatesville, Pennsylvania, he moved closer to Philly to train at a hardcore sweatshop that has developed many of the city's best fighters.

"I had a lawyer by the name of David Berker who involved me with Angelo Dundee and started me boxing at the 23rd PAL with Duke Dugent. My first trainer was Bob Brown," said Clark. "It was like a family down there. I sparred with a lot of those guys such as 'Cyclone' Hart and Willie Monroe. Quenzell McCall was there training Bennie Briscoe. Bennie had a hard left jab that could knock your head off.

"After a while, I got on the USA National Boxing Team and started to travel, first around the country and then overseas. I boxed in Germany, Kazakhstan, Cuba and Hawaii," said Clark.

Clark's final amateur record is difficult to pin down, but he was clearly among the best. After all, he won the 1977 U.S. National Golden Gloves heavyweight championship by outpointing future pro titleholders Greg Page and Tony Tubbs on the same day. His finest amateur performance was the TKO victory over Igor Vysotsky at Madison Square Garden on December 14, 1975. The Russian had beaten Cuban superstar Teofilo Stevenson twice, the first time by split decision and the second by TKO.

"Vysotsky was better than Stevenson," said Clark.

The Clark family celebrated Jimmy's triumph by framing the newspaper clippings from the Vysotsky fight, now on display for all to see on the same mantelpiece as the letter from President Carter.

A little over a month before Flight 007 plunged into the moat, Clark had the third and final bout in his trilogy with Stevenson. Clark lost all three but went the distance in two.

"Stevenson was a good fighter with a strong right hand," said Clark. "Most of the guys he fought got knocked out. All I had to do was keep my hands up and put my left hand in his face. I moved around, jab, jab, jab."

Less than three months after missing the fatal flight to Poland, Clark ended his amateur career with a points win over Anders Eklund on April 5, 1980.

Clark turned pro on January 15, 1981, at the Conrad Hilton Hotel in Chicago, tallying a first-round TKO of fellow debutant Steve Sandborne. Jimmy won six more times that year and three more in '82. Most of the competition was far from daunting. Then came Bermudian Clarence Hill, who had his island swagger and was the first to extend Clark 10 rounds. It was a competitive match with the split decision going to Jimmy.

Three fights later, the boxer who missed the plane lost his first pro fight when Reggie Gross stopped him in the ninth round on March 8, 1985. Had the bubble burst? Was Clark just another golden boy turned to pyrite? The truth is we will never know for sure, because Jimmy had three more fights – one in 1986, one in 1987 and a third that was switched to a "no contest" – then he retired.

With just one loss in 19 pro fights (16 KOs), you would expect Clark to regroup and continue his career. Maybe switch trainers, a common practice when a prospect suffers his first loss. But Jimmy had an ace in the hole, a career where you're less likely to get punched in the face.

"I had a law degree from West Chester State University," said Clark, who worked as a paralegal. "I majored in criminal justice, so I had to be in court some of the time. I really like boxing, but my love is the law.

"In civil court, you fight for money.

If somebody does something wrong to you, you retaliate in a civilized way," said Jimmy. "You don't use your fists; you get a pen and paper and let the jury decide. I have never really retired. If somebody needed some help, I would try to help them."

"My dad showed me how to knock somebody out," said James Jr. "He also taught me how to sue somebody. Good to know in the building business."

Before I left, I asked Jimmy if he still shadowboxed. Most retired boxers do. Once boxing gets in your blood, there's an inexorable urge to let your hands fly. "I do sometimes," said Clark, a sly look on his face. "I do some shadowboxing."

On Sunday, October 12, 2025, the spotlight will shine on Jimmy Clark for the first time in a long time when he is inducted into the Pennsylvania Boxing Hall of Fame (PBHOF) at the annual awards banquet. Clark is being honored for his amateur and professional career. He's also representing his 14 doomed teammates who perished in Poland and never had an opportunity to fulfill their dreams. But as George Eliot wrote, "Our dead are never dead to us, until we have forgotten them." Let's hope Clark's induction into the PBHOF jogs a few memories. RING

LETHAL LANDINGS

There has never been a plane crash in which so many boxers died as the 1980 catastrophe in Poland. Surprisingly, very few boxers have died in aviation accidents, but here are a few that did – two famous, two not so much. They are listed in chronological order:

Heavyweight **"Napoleon" Jack Dorval** was born in Pennsylvania and fought out of Boston. He was tall, skilled and fast, attributes that landed him on the cover of the July 1928 issue of The Ring. There was only one problem: He had extremely brittle bones and by 1930 had already broken his hands three times.

One of Dorval's best performances was a 10-round decision over "Two Ton" Tony Galento on May 22, 1931. The Galento fight was one in an eight-bout winning streak that earned Dorval a match with high-ranking contender Ernie Schaaf. It was a close, savage fight, with Schaaf winning a split decision. Dorval was gutted when Schaaf refused to give him a rematch, and after a win and a loss in his next two bouts, "Napoleon" Jack retired at the age of 28 with a record of 21-6-4 (14 KOs).

Rocky Marciano as heavyweight champ.

Friends convinced Dorval to make a comeback, and he agreed. On August 2, 1936, he arranged for pilot Frank McDowell to take him on a short flight in an open-cockpit biplane. As they approached the airport near Kersey, Pennsylvania, the plane hit an air pocket that sent it spiraling down, nose first into a potato field, killing 32-year-old Dorval. McDowell escaped with minor injuries.

New Yorker **Tommy Tucker** turned pro as a light heavyweight but frequently fought as a heavyweight. He had a prolonged stint as a preliminary fighter and, despite having just two losses in his first 44 bouts, it wasn't until August 15, 1939, that he had his first 10-rounder, winning a decision against Yancey Henry.

Notable victories came against former NBA middleweight champion Solly Krieger and Johnny Colan, and in his final fight he knocked out lethal-punching Tommy Gomez in the second round.

As it did for many boxers, World War II impeded Tucker's career. He joined the Navy as an air cadet based in Florida. In September 1943, he died in a plane crash at the airfield. He was 25 at the time.

When Jake LaMotta stopped Algeria-born Frenchman **Marcel Cerdan** to win the middleweight championship in June 1949, Cerdan probably didn't understand the extent of The Raging Bull's anything-goes style. In the first round, LaMotta threw Cerdan to the canvas with what historian Bert Sugar called "as pretty a hip roll as ever seen in a wrestling bout." Cerdan injured his left shoulder when he fell, making him virtually a one-handed fighter. He struggled on the best he could until the end of the ninth round, but Marcel didn't answer the bell for the 10th.

A rematch was scheduled for December 2, 1949, and on the evening of October 26, Cerdan boarded an Air France Constellation for a flight to New York. Early the next morning, the plane dropped out of radio contact. The plane was supposed to land on the island of Santa Maria in the Azores, but instead it plowed into Algarvia Peak on the island of Sao Miguel, 90 miles north of Santa Maria. All 48 people aboard were killed. It was theorized that rain, fog and lowering clouds confused the pilot into thinking Sao Miguel was Santa Maria.

The day before undefeated former heavyweight champion **Rocky Marciano's** 46th birthday, he boarded a single-engine Cessna for a flight from Chicago to Des Moines, Iowa, where a party was going to be held in his honor. The plane was supposed to land at Newtown Airport but crashed into a wooded area about two miles from the airport the evening of August 31,1969. The pilot, Marciano and another passenger died upon impact. RING

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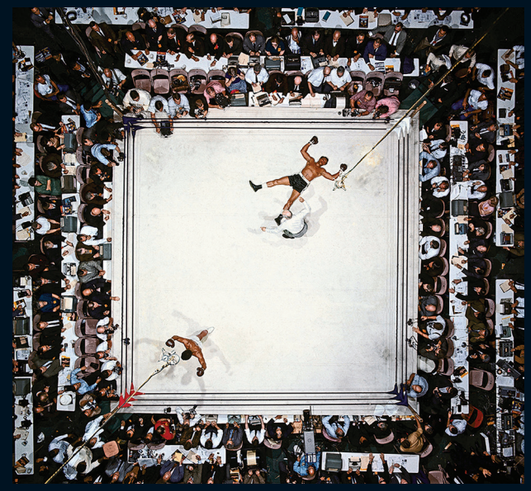

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MUHAMMAD ALI VS. JOE FRAZIER III
OCT. 1, 1975

By Tom Gray • Photographs by Neil Leifer

ROUND 1: WHAT ELSE WAS HAPPENING IN OCTOBER 1975?

- The Soviet Venera 9 probe landed on Venus, capturing the first images from the surface of another planet.
- 90% of Icelandic women participated in a "Day Off" strike "to protest wage discrepancy and unfair employment practices."
- The Cincinnati Reds defeated the Boston Red Sox in Game 7 to win the World Series.
- The first episode of *Saturday Night Live* aired on NBC.
- Queen released "Bohemian Rhapsody," which became one of the band's signature songs.
- *Jaws* had just finished a 14-week run as the number one box-office movie in the U.S.

ROUND 2: TALE OF THE TAPE (NOTE: EVERYTHING EXCEPT AGE AND WEIGHT WAS TAKEN FROM THE JANUARY 1974 ISSUE OF THE RING).

Ali		Frazier
33	**Age**	31
224½ lbs.	**Weight**	215½ lbs.
6-foot-3	**Height**	5-foot-11½
78 in.	**Reach**	73 in.
42 in.	**Chest Normal**	44 in.
44 in.	**Chest Expanded**	45½ in.
34 in.	**Waist**	33 in.
16½ in.	**Biceps**	15 in.
25 in.	**Thigh**	24½ in.
17 in.	**Calf**	16 in.
12 in.	**Fists**	13 in.

***Note:** The weigh-in took place five days before the bout.

ROUND 3: ARENA HISTORY

The Araneta Coliseum, which is located in Quezon City, Philippines, adjacent to the capital city of Manila, was built between 1957 and 1959. It opened on March 16, 1960, and for a few years was the world's biggest covered coliseum.

In the inaugural event, Filipino lefty and future Hall of Famer Gabriel "Flash" Elorde knocked out Harold Gomes in an upset to claim the junior lightweight title.

To date, there have been 240 fight cards held in the arena, which also hosts other sporting events and music concerts.

ROUND 4: COST OF FIGHT TICKETS

The cheapest seats in the stands cost $20. A ringside seat would have cost you $150, which in 2025, adjusted for inflation, would be equivalent to about $900.

ROUND 5: FIGHTERS' RECORDS COMING INTO THE BOUT

Ali, the champion, was 48-2 (34 KOs) coming in. His two losses, to Joe Frazier on March 8, 1971, and Ken Norton on March 31, 1973, had both been avenged via decision.

Frazier, the challenger, was 32-2 (27 KOs). His setbacks came at the hands of George Foreman, who relieved him of the heavyweight championship on January 22, 1973, and Ali, who comfortably outpointed his rival on January 28, 1974.

ROUND 6: FORM GUIDE (EACH FIGHTER'S PREVIOUS SIX BOUTS)

Muhammad Ali

Date	Opponent	Result
Oct. 20, 1973	Rudi Lubbers	UD 12
Jan. 28, 1974	Joe Frazier	UD 12
Oct. 30, 1974	George Foreman	KO 8
March 24, 1975	Chuck Wepner	TKO 15
May 16, 1975	Ron Lyle	TKO 11
June 30, 1975	Joe Bugner	UD 15

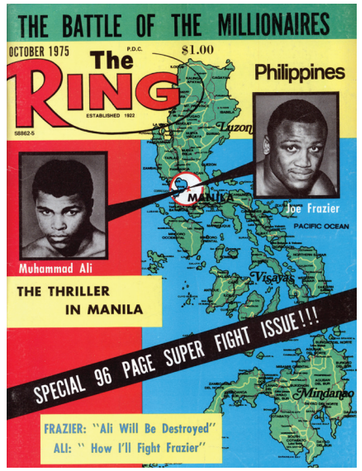
Joe Frazier

Date	Opponent	Result
May 25, 1972	Ron Stander	TKO 4
Jan. 22, 1973	George Foreman	L TKO 2
July 2, 1973	Joe Bugner	UD 12
Jan. 28, 1974	Muhammad Ali	L UD 12
June 17, 1974	Jerry Quarry	TKO 5
March 2, 1975	Jimmy Ellis	TKO 9

ROUND 7: TRAINING TEAM BREAKDOWN

Ali
Chief Second: Angelo Dundee
Cornerman: Wali Muhammad
Cornerman: Drew "Bundini" Brown
Advisor: Dick Sadler
Physician: Ferdie Pacheco

Frazier
Chief Second: Eddie Futch
Assistant Trainer: George Benton
Cutman: Milt Bailey



ROUND 8: THE PROMOTER

Ali vs. Frazier III was the brainchild of Don King, who was promoting his fourth Muhammad Ali fight. Following The Greatest's title-regaining triumph over George Foreman on October 30, 1974, King had put together defenses against Chuck Wepner, Ron Lyle and Joe Bugner.

To put into context how far King had come, the flamboyant hustler from Cleveland had listened to the first Ali vs. Frazier fight on the radio in his prison cell at the Marion Correctional Institution in Ohio, where he served time for second-degree murder.

ROUND 9: OFFICIALS AND SCORING

The fight was scored by referee Carlos Padilla and ringside judges Larry Nadayag and Alfredo Quiazon, all of whom hailed from the Philippines. The scoring was done on a five-point must system.

At the time of the 14th-round corner stoppage, Ali was comfortably ahead on all three scorecards. Frazier would have needed a knockout in the final round to secure victory.

Padilla: 66-60 (8-2-4 Ali)
Nadayag: 66-62 (8-4-2 Ali)
Quiazon: 67-62 (8-3-3 Ali)

ROUND 10: COMPUBOX STATS

Total Punches Landed/ Thrown

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Ali	34/80	17/41	24/61	31/65	22/61	15/47	46/81	41/85	8/42	32/65	47/76	36/64	40/75	50/74	-/-
	42.5%	41.5%	39.3%	47.7%	36.1%	31.9%	56.8%	48.2%	19.0%	49.2%	61.8%	56.3%	53.3%	67.6%	-
Frazier	15/35	22/37	26/60	22/47	24/48	32/57	25/50	39/56	30/45	36/61	29/57	27/47	19/42	8/32	-/-
	42.9%	59.5%	43.3%	46.8%	50%	56.1%	50%	69.6%	66.7%	59.0%	50.9%	57.4%	45.2%	25%	-

Jabs Landed/ Thrown

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Ali	8/22	3/13	1/4	1/8	2/5	1/8	25/44	2/6	3/23	0/5	8/16	2/7	4/17	18/27	-/-
	36.4%	23.1%	25%	12.5%	40%	12.5%	56.8%	33.3%	13%	0%	50%	28.6%	23.5%	66.7%	-
Frazier	6/13	2/8	0/5	0/2	0/1	1/2	2/3	1/2	0/0	3/3	0/2	0/0	1/3	1/3	-/-
	46.2%	25.0%	0%	0%	0%	50%	66.7%	50%	0.0%	100%	0.0%	0.0%	33.3%	33.3%	-

Power Punches Landed/ Thrown

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Ali	26/58	14/28	23/57	30/57	20/56	14/39	21/37	39/79	5/19	32/60	39/60	34/57	36/58	32/47	-/-
	44.8%	50%	40.4%	52.6%	35.7%	35.9%	56.8%	49.4%	26.3%	53.3%	65.0%	59.6%	62.1%	68.1%	-
Frazier	9/22	20/29	26/55	22/45	24/47	31/55	23/47	38/54	30/45	33/58	29/55	27/47	18/39	7/29	-/-
	40.9%	69.0%	47.3%	48.9%	51.1%	56.4%	48.9%	70.4%	66.7%	56.9%	52.7%	57.4%	46.2%	24.1%	-

Final Punch Stat Report

Total	Total Punches	Total Jabs	Power Punches
Ali	443/917	78/205	365/712
	48.30%	38%	51.30%
Frazier	354/674	17/47	337/627
	52.50%	36.20%	53.70%

"The breakfast time fight of a lifetime!"
– Harry Carpenter during commentary, BBC

ROUND 11: PURSES/VIEWING AUDIENCE

Ali received a guarantee of $4.5 million plus 43% of gross earnings, adding up to an estimated $9 million. Frazier signed on for $2 million and was promised 22% of the gross.

The fight was shown on closed-circuit television in 380 locations in the United States alone. The total closed-circuit audience is estimated to have been around the 100 million mark.

With 68 countries broadcasting the fight, some sources have estimated that approximately one billion people watched "The Thrilla in Manila."

ROUND 12: THE RING COVERAGE (FIVE COVERS)

August 1975
October 1975
November 1975
December 1975
March 1976

HEAVYWEIGHT TOP 10 (RATINGS FROM SEPTEMBER 1975 ISSUE)

Champion:
Muhammad Ali
1. George Foreman
2. Joe Frazier
3. Ken Norton
4. Bunny Johnson
5. Jimmy Young
6. Joe Bugner
7. Earnie Shavers
8. Oscar Bonavena
9. Ron Lyle
10. Chuck Wepner

ROUND 13: THE RING AWARD

For the second year in a row, Ali scooped Fighter of the Year, Fight of the Year and Round of the Year (12) honors.

ROUND 14: MEMORIES OF MANILA

"The breakfast time fight of a lifetime!" – Harry Carpenter during commentary, BBC

"What we felt was awe at the spectacle of extraordinary men setting new limits for themselves, pushing back the boundaries of their courage, their physical and psychological capacity." – Hugh McIlvanney from ringside, The Observer

"Time may well erode that long morning drama in Manila, but for anyone who was there, those faces will return again and again to evoke what it was like when two of the greatest heavyweights of any era met for a third time and left millions limp around the world. Muhammad Ali caught the way it was: "It was like death. Closest thing to dyin' that I know of." – Mark Kram catches the post-fight aftermath, Sports Illustrated RING

BOOK REVIEW:

BLOOD & HATE

VIVID STORYTELLING SHINES IN A NEW BIOGRAPHY ABOUT MIDDLEWEIGHT LEGEND **MARVELOUS MARVIN HAGLER**

By Thomas Gerbasi

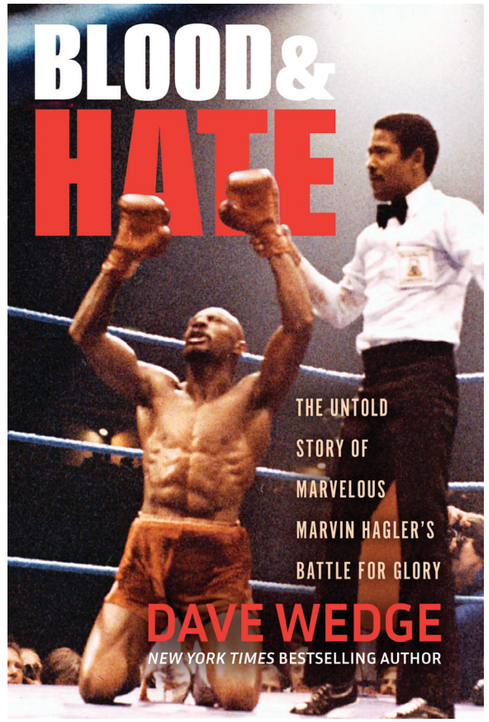
My favorite story in Dave Wedge's new book on Marvelous Marvin Hagler, *Blood & Hate*, has nothing to do with the late, great middleweight champion.

Vinnie Vecchione, best known as the manager and trainer of one-time Mike Tyson foe Peter McNeeley, had arranged for one of his boxers to fight unbeaten Ennio Cometti in Italy in January 1974. Vecchione's fighter wasn't going to make it, and the promoter wasn't going to call the fight off. So Vecchione, who'd never had a pro fight, took another one of his boxer's ID cards, flew to Italy and fought Cornetti as Paul Poirier, getting stopped in the process for $600.

My point? These are the kinds of stories that boxing used to be full of. There were characters everywhere, both in and out of the ring, and it was a big reason why the sport was on the front page and not buried next to the classifieds in the newspaper, if there are even newspapers covering boxing these days.

Blood & Hate captures these stories. But Hagler is obviously the star of the show, and while the rest of the Four Kings (Roberto Duran, Thomas Hearns and Sugar Ray Leonard) have had their stories told to the masses, this is the one of the rare times we get to see Hagler's tale fleshed out. And the bald-headed terror of the 160-pound division becomes human, not just a machine taking out challenger after challenger.

"This book has been a labor of love for me," said Wedge. "It's something I've wanted to do for a long time. I grew up in Brockton, I was a journalist for 20 years, and now I write books, and I just never really had the opportunity. And then after Marvin passed, here it is. And I know I could never tell his whole story, because it would be 800 pages, but this part of the story to me is the essence of who Marvin was and shows people the reason why he was the way he was, why he had that drive. And that's why I wanted to do it. I think people all across the world need to know this story. It is such an inspirational, amazing story."



Like Mark Kriegel's recent biography on Mike Tyson, *Blood & Hate* doesn't tell the entire story of Hagler's life but features the period from his formative years in New Jersey up until the night he defeated Alan Minter to win the middleweight title in 1980. Just as *Baddest Man* ends with Tyson's win over Michael Spinks, ending *Blood & Hate* at the Minter fight feels right, as it captures a moment in time that encapsulated Hagler's life to that point.

He beat Minter like he stole something that September night in Wembley Arena, finally getting the world title he fought so hard to win. But he couldn't enjoy it due to the madness that erupted after the fight, a disgraceful display of the racism that had followed him from his days growing up in Newark, New Jersey. Yet who was with him throughout, trying to shield him from the bottles flying into the ring, but the Petronelli brothers – Goody and Pat – who had been with him from the start of his boxing journey until the end.

If you don't know, Hagler was Black and the Petronellis were white, and their inseparable bond survived both the boxing business and the shaky race relations that surrounded them in Massachusetts.

Hagler, pictured behind manager-trainer Pat Petronelli, eventually received his due respect.

Boston Globe

"It's what boxing's all about," said Wedge. "It's these kids that almost have no other opportunity in life, and they run across someone that inspires them and touches them in a way that they can find a way to do something meaningful in their life. And that's what happened with Marvin and the Petronellis. He was an aimless kid. He had nowhere to go. He finds his way into this gym in Brockton and meets these two guys who he had no reason to have any connection with, and they build this beautiful, amazing, lifelong friendship."

It wasn't easy. And once that trust was built between the three, it only got harder to navigate a boxing business not ready to accept a no-nonsense southpaw from Brockton who would fight anyone, anywhere, at any time. It forced Hagler to take his show on the road … to Philadelphia.

The City of Brotherly Love was where the Hagler legend truly began to take shape, and Wedge beautifully covers not just the fights the future champion had to take to move somewhere in the division, but the fighters he fought, including Bobby Watts, Willie Monroe, Eugene Hart and Bennie Briscoe. Those fights made a hard man into a man of steel and seemingly prepped him for what was to come.

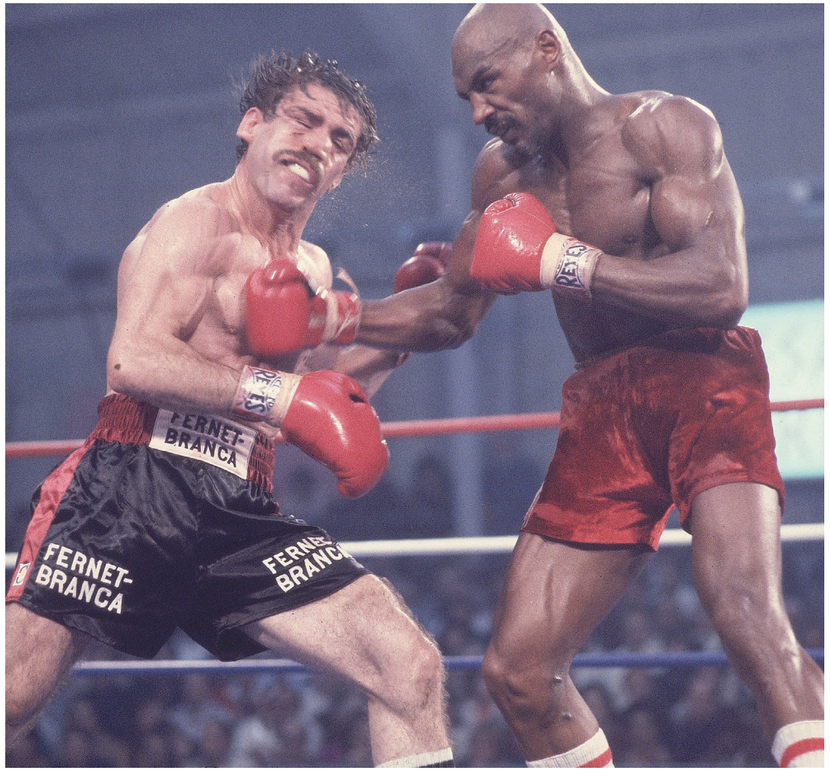
"Every one of these fights back in that era was worth a book," said Wedge. "Those Philly fights that I write about in this book, it's world-class stuff. Everyone had a backstory, and there were characters and nuance, and for me as a writer and as a journalist and a storyteller, it's a lot of fun to dig into these old nuggets of history and kind of bring them forward to the new generation. That's really what I'm trying to do here."

Eventually, Hagler would get his title shot, only to receive a draw against champion Vito Antuofermo. The Italian would lose his belt to the other main character in the book, Alan Minter. The Brit has a complicated history, but Wedge tells it fairly, even if pre-fight quotes from Minter saying that he'd never lose his title to a Black man are still cringeworthy decades later.

"When I was writing this, I was like, 'You know what, Alan Minter has a pretty incredible story, and his story needs to be shared in here,'" said Wedge. "Now, does he come off as the archvillain? No, he's not. But he did some bad stuff and he pissed some people off. His family is aware of that, and it upset them, and Marvin wasn't happy about it. And obviously the things he said were terrible, but he's an imperfect human. And him and Marvin had a colossal fight, and then they did reconcile later in life. They weren't best friends, but they let bygones be bygones.

So I think sharing that story of Minter's journey is important, too. And again, look at what he went through in Munich [during the Olympic Games], and then he killed a guy in the ring, and that was very traumatic; it changed Alan's life. His story's worth telling, too." [Editor's note: Angelo Jacopucci, who suffered a 12th-round stoppage to Minter in Italy on July 19, 1978, died three days later from a brain injury sustained during their European middleweight title bout.]

Luckily, Wedge was telling it, along with the stories of Hagler, the Petronellis, Rocky Marciano and the cast of characters that made up the boxing world of the 1970s. It was a different time. Some would say better, others would say worse, but "different" definitely covers it. And who better to tell the tale of Hagler than a Brockton native?



Most thought Hagler was robbed in his draw with Vito Antuofermo in 1979.

Minter fought fire with fire against the rampaging Hagler and came in second.

"I have to say, selfishly, I'm a Brockton guy," Wedge laughs. "I grew up in Brockton. I believe in Brockton. I wouldn't have written this book if I wasn't from Brockton."

You can tell the affection Wedge has for his hometown and the people who called it home just by reading *Blood & Hate*. And while there are certainly dark times and heavy issues addressed in its pages, telling the often untold tale of one of boxing's greats had to be easier than writing about the likes of Whitey Bulger, the last days of John Lennon and the Boston Marathon bombing.

"I have written about a lot of dark subjects, and it was nice to not be writing something dark, although there is a true crime edge to this book in the racism angle and what happened at Wembley after Marvin won," said Wedge. "But it's a story of triumph. What I like to say is Marvin wasn't Bill Russell, he wasn't Muhammad Ali, he wasn't Jesse Owens. He didn't raise his fist on the podium at the Olympics. He didn't march in the streets, arm in arm with civil rights leaders. But I call him the unlikely civil rights hero because he did go into England and fight this guy who was backed by a racist white power group. The guy [Minter] makes a horrible racist comment, and he [Hagler] literally fought racism and he won. So I think that's an important story to share. He was a quiet leader in that aspect. And if that's one message people take away, I think that's a good one." RING

FUNDAMENTALS

By Anson Wainwright

FORGOTTEN CLASSIC:

James Toney KO 12 Charles Williams

» July 29, 1994

MGM Grand, Las Vegas

At just shy of 26 years old but already a 45-fight veteran, James Toney was in the thick of his prime and widely considered one of the pound-for-pound best fighters on the planet.

Toney, the reigning IBF 168-pound titleholder at the time, was on a collision course with rising star Roy Jones Jr. However, the Michigan native was an old-school fighter who liked to stay active, so in the interim he opted for a dangerous title defense against "Prince" Charles Williams, who'd held the IBF light heavyweight title from 1987 to 1993 and was dropping down to super middleweight for the opportunity. It would be Toney's fourth fight of the year and his 19th since winning a middleweight title three years earlier – unthinkable by modern standards.

For his part, the 32-year-old Williams' only loss in the previous nine years was when he was controversially dethroned by Henry Maske in Germany.

Against Toney, Williams was the aggressor early on, pushing the defending champion to the ropes. Always comfortable in the pocket, Toney tucked up and looked to counter, remaining calm in the heat of battle.

The two fought much of the contest on the inside, with Williams looking to grapple and rough Toney up. The challenger was ahead on all three scorecards after five rounds.

Toney lost a point in Round 8 for hitting after the bell and was dealing with considerable swelling around his left eye, but he drew upon his formidable array of skills and upped his activity to seize control of the fight in the later stages. Williams wasn't going to go lightly and came out for the 11th round with renewed purpose. The two fought at a frenetic pace, but the surging Toney landed 90 punches to Williams' 59 in the penultimate round.

Toney then sealed Williams' fate in true "Lights Out" fashion, snapping the challenger's head back with jabs while moving to his left to set up a perfectly timed right hand that almost bent Williams in half before he toppled heavily onto his back. Williams tried to get up but was counted out on his hands and knees by Joe Cortez with just 15 seconds remaining.

Larry Merchant, who was on the HBO broadcast, said of Toney: "We're watching a great fighter. This guy took the other guy's best – his strength, his experience – a bigger man. He stuck in there with him and then when the time came, he finished him.

Al Bello

LOST FIGHT:

Archie Moore W 15 Nino Valdes

» May 2, 1955

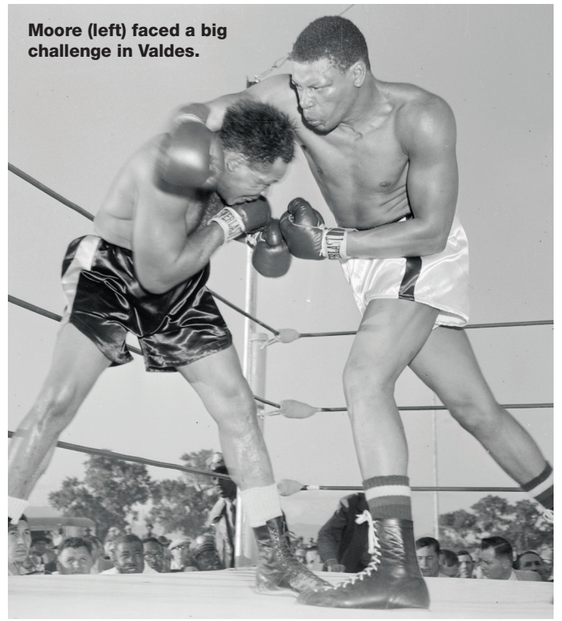
Cashman Field, Las Vegas

Early on in Archie Moore's light heavyweight championship reign, he fought a non-title bout with heavyweight contender Nino Valdes in March 1953. Although Moore won a 10-round unanimous decision, the popular Cuban gave him one of his toughest fights.

Just over two years later, after some confusion that saw Moore have his license suspended because of an issue with his heart, forcing the cancellation of a March fight with Frankie Daniels, "The Old Mongoose" was back in the ring against the naturally bigger Valdes. Whereas Valdes weighed in at 209½ pounds for both fights, Moore came in at 180 for the first encounter but bulked up to 196½ pounds for the second.

Renowned manager Doc Kearns was the promoter of the show, which is now seen as the first major boxing event to take place in Las Vegas, and proclaimed it to be the world heavyweight championship (at least in Nevada) – a dig at reigning champion Rocky Marciano, who he said refused to fight Moore or Valdes.

Moore, who opened as a 2-to-1 betting favorite, again dealt with the bigger Valdes in a grueling affair. Both showed signs of battle – Moore sporting a damaged left eye and bleeding from the nose and mouth while Valdes' left eye was swollen shut – but Moore came on strong in the championship rounds to claim the victory.



Moore (left) faced a big challenge in Valdes.

Former heavyweight champion Jim Braddock refereed the contest and was the sole judge, scoring in Moore's favor, eight rounds to five and two rounds even.

Valdes fought on for another four years but was never able to secure a heavyweight title shot. Meanwhile, Moore was able to face Marciano in September 1955 but was knocked out in nine rounds. He never quite made it as a heavyweight, losing in a second title attempt to Floyd Patterson (KO 5). However, Moore made nine world title defenses at light heavyweight, where he is widely regarded as one of the best in the division's deep history.

MUST-WATCH:

THE PROMISE

Fast-rising super middleweight contender Osleys Iglesias enjoyed a breakout 2024.

In *The Promise*, a documentary broadcast on Canadian networks TVA Sports and TVA Sports 2 in April, we got to learn a little more about him. It begins with Iglesias, who now lives in Bremen, Germany, talking on the phone to his mother, who still lives in Havana, Cuba, about his desire to be number one.

The documentary goes back to when he was a child, and he talks about how he was lazy and didn't like to study. He used sports as a vehicle to get away from school and soon afterward found boxing.

Iglesias was a national champion in his mid-teens and then joined the national team, which allowed him to travel and see the world. On one particular trip, he was told if he won a tournament in Germany, he would be selected for the national team at the upcoming World Championships. However, the powers that be reneged on that promise and elected to send the more experienced Arlen Lopez. The betrayal hit Iglesias hard, and having seen a different side of life in Germany, he defected. He called his mother and said, "You'll see me again when I'm champion of the world."

Since teaming up with Eye of The Tiger Management, Iglesias has been on something of a tear, stopping former world title challenger Marcelo Coceres in one round, then stunningly repeating the trick by scoring one of the most chilling knockouts of 2024 against Evgeny Shvedenko. Next was Sena Agbeko, who lasted into the second round, and then Petro Ivanov, who lost his unbeaten record in five.

Iglesias' vision is to become undisputed super middleweight champion. Fight by fight, he's getting closer to that dream. A promise is a promise, after all. RING

Though seriously cut, Filip Hrgovic's composure, along with sound corner advice, led him to victory.

IS THERE A RIGHT TIME?

By Dr. Margaret Goodman

Many would agree a boxing referee has the most difficult job of any sports official. The ring physician's role runs a close second. Much of that pertains to determining the right time to stop or let a fight go. In many jurisdictions, the physician can only recommend to the referee that a bout stop, while in others the doctor can make that call. Nevertheless, these roles carry a burden few understand, and the decision is seldom clear-cut and instantaneous.

I was never happier to see a fight stop at the right time – irrespective of who made the call. You always want a fight to proceed to its natural conclusion with the boxers determining the outcome. That means that if a fight needs to end from something other than a knockout/TKO, the best one to intervene is: 1) the corner, 2) the referee, 3) the ring physician – in that order.

The decision is not always medical. Sometimes the fighter has had enough! Their bravery is unmatched, but their body language, a facial expression or reaction to a cut, blood or knockdown can make the call. It just behooves the physician and referee to recognize the clues.

"First and foremost, the indication to stop a fight is when one fighter is obviously dominant over the other (who has no chance of winning)," says Dr. Edwin "Flip" Homansky, former Nevada commissioner and chief physician. "Punishment in a fighter's career is additive, and if they can be spared unnecessary head shots, everyone involved is doing them a favor to return another day. Secondly, blood, when it obstructs the fighter's vision or the fighter is freaked out by his/her own blood, can necessitate a stop. If the corner is totally incompetent and not protecting their fighter, that's a time to intervene. A fighter that you know that has a prior injury that seems to have worsened – including a prior concussion, laceration or skeletal injury (such as a bad hand) – should make you 'pull the trigger' earlier."

A discussion on fighter cuts could require a book, but a cut itself is seldom the reason for an experienced ring physician to recommend a stoppage. "Cuts are never easy," notes Homansky, "but one that is in a dangerous area – like where nerves or blood vessels run or one in a cosmetic area around the eyelid itself or lip that would be difficult to repair – need to stop."

In 2003, I recommended that a contest between Diego Corrales and Joel Casamayor be stopped. Corrales sustained severe lacerations to his tongue, lip and cheek and was swallowing significant blood. Permitting that bout to continue placed Corrales at risk. As an official, it's important to "sell your call" to the public. I was unable to do so. Sometimes it is simply not possible for the camera to convey what a ring physician is seeing up close.

In the recent bout between Filip Hrgovic and David Adeleye, Hrgovic sustained a serious cut above his right eye in Round 2. He remained composed while his corner and trainer Abel Sanchez stopped the bleeding. This is an excellent example of when to *not* stop a bout on a cut.

However, a cut can be instrumental in stopping a fight when a fighter has had enough. Dr. Homansky and referee Joe Cortez recognized that Julio Cesar Chavez had had enough in his 1996 bout with Oscar De La Hoya: Homansky recommended the bout be stopped in the fourth round, and Cortez made the call. Chavez was bleeding from a laceration over his left eye, but it wasn't the cut that stopped that fight. It was the punishment being inflicted.

This speaks to knowing your fighters. The times where I felt fighters were at greater risk were when I had no knowledge of the fighter's skill level, had never seen them compete or couldn't access any of their prior bouts on TV or online. It's the same for a doctor seeing a patient in their office for the first time: You want them to have their medical record. So knowing the fighter's history is often a clue as to when a fight should continue or not. Unfortunately, boxing has no medical data bank or a place where the ring physician can access a fighter's medical records from other jurisdictions where they might've competed. BoxRec (a boxing data app) is helpful, but it often doesn't include sufficient medical details.

Cortez always did his homework: "Look at their last fight. Did they have a TKO from headshots or cuts? You have to be mentally prepared. When I gave my prefight instructions in the dressing room, I would tell them, 'First and foremost, your safety is most important. I will watch out for you so you can go home to your family.' I talk to the trainer and make certain they know they can stop the fight on their own."

I had the honor of working with Joe, a member of the International Boxing Hall of Fame, for many years. We would meet ringside before the card began and discuss the fighters. "Know the rules and the doctors – including their experience," notes Cortez. "Some doctors are good doctors, but *not* good ringside doctors!" Joe and I had barely noticeable signals when I sat ringside. We would just look at one another and know when to step in.

Highly respected referee Harvey Dock first started working the pros in New Jersey in 2003, then New York in 2018: "No two fights are the same. Club shows are different than 12-round events." He says referees need to be aware there's an "A" and "B" side (where the "B" may not be as skilled or experienced). "I tell referees that you know what the promoter did [in matchmaking], so you don't want to be the reason that fighters get hurt."

Julio Cesar Chavez was injured in his 1996 fight with Oscar De La Hoya.

Dock is confident in the moment: "I have to take everything as it happens. I don't communicate with the doctor before the fight. If I'm concerned, I have the doctor come up." Dock, like Cortez, is a disciple of former referee and New Jersey Commissioner Larry Hazzard. "Hazzard taught me that if you need to confer with the doctor, then stop it. The fighter has had enough," said Dock. "Over the last 10 years, I've been more direct in stopping fights."

Dock notes things have changed over the last seven to eight years in assessing a fighter during the round after a knockdown. "We used to just say 'walk to me,' but now we ask the fighter to take a few steps to the right and to the left to test both sides of their brain."

In New York, the referee can call "time" and give the physician more than the one-minute break to examine a fighter of concern. Both Cortez and I remain against this practice. The one minute between rounds is almost always long enough for the physician to make a decision whether the fighter should continue. Plus, if the physician is concerned about a concussion, they are giving the athlete more time to recover and risk further injury – and giving the fighter in the opposite corner more time to rest. Again, the philosophy of Larry Hazzard rings true: Stop the fight!

The bottom line is that nothing surpasses fighter safety in such an inherently dangerous sport. And nothing can override the importance of experience on the part of the referee and ring physician. RING

REMEMBERING DWIGHT

By Randy Gordon

It was Thursday, November 2, 1978. I was in Harlem, New York, for a boxing card at the Audubon Ballroom. I was there to cover the card for the boxing magazine I was editor of – World & International Boxing – as well as to do a write-up for my friend Malcolm "Flash" Gordon's underground newsletter, Tonight's Boxing Program.

The card was strictly a club show. I was particularly interested in one of the six-rounders: A light heavyweight contest between my Long Island friend Johnny Davis and his opponent from Camden, New Jersey: Dwight Braxton.

On the way into the building, I ran into the card's matchmaker, Johnny Bos. He filled me in on a few of the fighters. Included was the information that Braxton had recently been released from prison, where he served several years for armed robbery.

Once inside, I saw a handmade sign taped to a wall that said, "BOXER'S DRESSING ROOMS" with an arrow pointing left.

I followed the arrow to a long hallway. I stopped when I came to a sign that said BRAXTON.

A short, stocky fighter approached with two of his cornermen. The fighter wore a black sweatshirt and black sweatpants. The hood on his sweatshirt was up, partially obscuring his face.

"Looking for someone?" asked the fighter.

"Yes, I am," I replied. "I'm looking for Dwight Braxton."

"What business you got?" he asked.

"I'm a reporter," I replied. "Are you Dwight Braxton?"

"I am," he said. "Get lost. I don't speak to no reporters."

I told him I just needed to ask a few questions, because I was covering the fight.

He nodded.

"A few questions, then get lost!"

I asked his age.

"25."

I questioned how tall he was.

"Five-six-and-a-half."

I asked where he was from.

"Camden."

I asked if he had an amateur record.

"Had none," he snarled.

Finally, when I asked him about being incarcerated, he took a step toward me. One of his cornermen pulled him back.

"Get lost! Get the fuck away from me!"

He was very convincing.

"Thank you for your time," I said. I quickly turned and walked away.

That night, Johnny Davis outboxed Braxton in a very competitive, entertaining fight. Davis won the six-round bout by split decision, handing Braxton his first loss and bringing his record to 1-1-1.

However, in that defeat, I thought Braxton showed a lot of promise and untapped talent. Though I knew I wasn't his favorite reporter, I decided to pay close attention to his career.

I attended 11 of his next 14 fights over the next three years. Included were ringside press seats at Rahway State Prison in September 1981, when he outpointed inmate James Scott (a Ring-rated light heavyweight at the time); when he TKO'd Ring/WBC titleholder Matthew Saad Muhammad to become champion in December 1981; and in Las Vegas, Atlantic City and Philadelphia for all three of his successful title defenses.

I was at the press conference he held in early 1982, announcing that he was changing his name from Dwight Braxton to Dwight Muhammad Qawi. At each of those events, whenever I asked a question as a member of the media, he would either avoid taking my question or say, "What's your question, Gordon?" in a tone where he always sounded annoyed.

It all came to a head 16 days after Qawi stopped top-rated Jerry "The Bull" Martin in Las Vegas.

I was ringside for the fight, covering for both ESPN and The Ring. Qawi refused to do an interview with me, telling other reporters, "I don't like the guy."

That was fine, because I didn't like him either.

Right after that fight, ESPN's executive producer decided to bring Qawi to the still-being-built studios in Bristol, Connecticut, to be a guest on their one-hour magazine-type show, SportsCenter Plus. Qawi agreed. What he didn't know is that I would be the host.

On April 6, ESPN sent a car to bring Qawi from Camden to Bristol. On a "normal" day, the trip takes just under four hours.

April 6 was anything but normal. The Northeast sector of the U.S. was hit that day by a freak Nor'easter, which dumped several feet of snow on the area.

Qawi's limo left Camden at noon, anticipating a 4 p.m. arrival.

They ran smack into the blizzard midway between Camden and Bristol. They walked in at 6:30.

When the call to the studio came from security that "Mr. Qawi is here," I skipped taking the elevator and ran down the two flights of stairs to greet the light heavyweight champ in the lobby.

When he saw me walking toward him, Qawi's tired face took on a look of anger.

"Hi, Champ! Welcome to ESPN!" I said.

He pointed at me.

"What the hell are you doing here?" he roared.

"I'm doing the interview with you," I said.

"Like hell you are!" he shouted. "Somebody else better be doing the interview."

"I know you're tired from that brutal drive, Champ," I said, trying to change the direction of the conversation.

"Want to use the men's room? There's even a shower in there, and we'll give you a new ESPN shirt and sweatpants to put on."

"BULLSHIT!" he screamed. "I'm not staying!" He turned to the limo driver and demanded, "Take me home!"

The driver, the security guard and I just looked at Qawi.

"We're lucky to have gotten here," said the driver. "We ain't going anywhere! Look outside!"

We did. Everything was white.

I looked at Qawi and forced a smile.

"Looks like you're stuck with me, Dwight," I said.

Then I added, in a loud voice, "You think this is easy for me? I have been given the job of having to interview the grumpiest, nastiest, most disliked champion in boxing history. Getting punched in the face by you would be easier than sitting down with you and doing an interview. I'm doing it because it's my job, not because I want to. No boxing journalist would want to be me tonight!"

I glared at him and stepped toward him. I expected to be hit.

"Where's the bathroom?" he asked.

"Follow me!" I said.

We took the elevator up two floors. We didn't talk. I showed him into the men's room, complete with a shower.

"There are clean towels in there. When you are done, I will be in the office across the hall. It's the Sports Newsroom."

I glanced quickly at him. He glanced back. I actually detected a bit of a smile, but didn't smile back. Instead, I turned and walked away.

I sat in the newsroom and prepared my notes. As I did, announcer Bob Ley came in with an ESPN gym bag. Inside were an ESPN shirt, ESPN sweatshirt, ESPN hat and ESPN sweatpants, along with an ESPN key ring, pens and notepads.

I walked to the men's room and pushed open the door. Dwight was in the shower.

"I'm putting some gifts for you on the floor!" I said.

I heard a "Thank you!" as I walked out.

I smiled.

From the moment Qawi stepped into the newsroom, wearing his new ESPN paraphernalia, he also wore a smile. He was a different man than the snarling pit bull I had previously known.

The on-air interview went better than I ever thought it would.

Following the interview, we went into the Jock's Lounge and watched tapes of his fights. With the blizzard still raging, we weren't going anywhere. We talked through the night. We went from being two guys who couldn't stand each other to being two close friends.

In the morning, another driver was hired to drive Qawi home.

We stayed in touch from that moment.

Shortly before the Covid virus hit in 2020, Qawi came to the SiriusXM studios to be a guest on the show I have hosted with Gerry Cooney since 2009.

Qawi looked beaten and broken down. He was hard to understand. Cooney and I gave him some money.

When I attempted to call him the following week, his phone had been turned off. I attempted to reach him again, but couldn't.

That day in the SiriusXM studio was the last I ever saw or spoke to him.

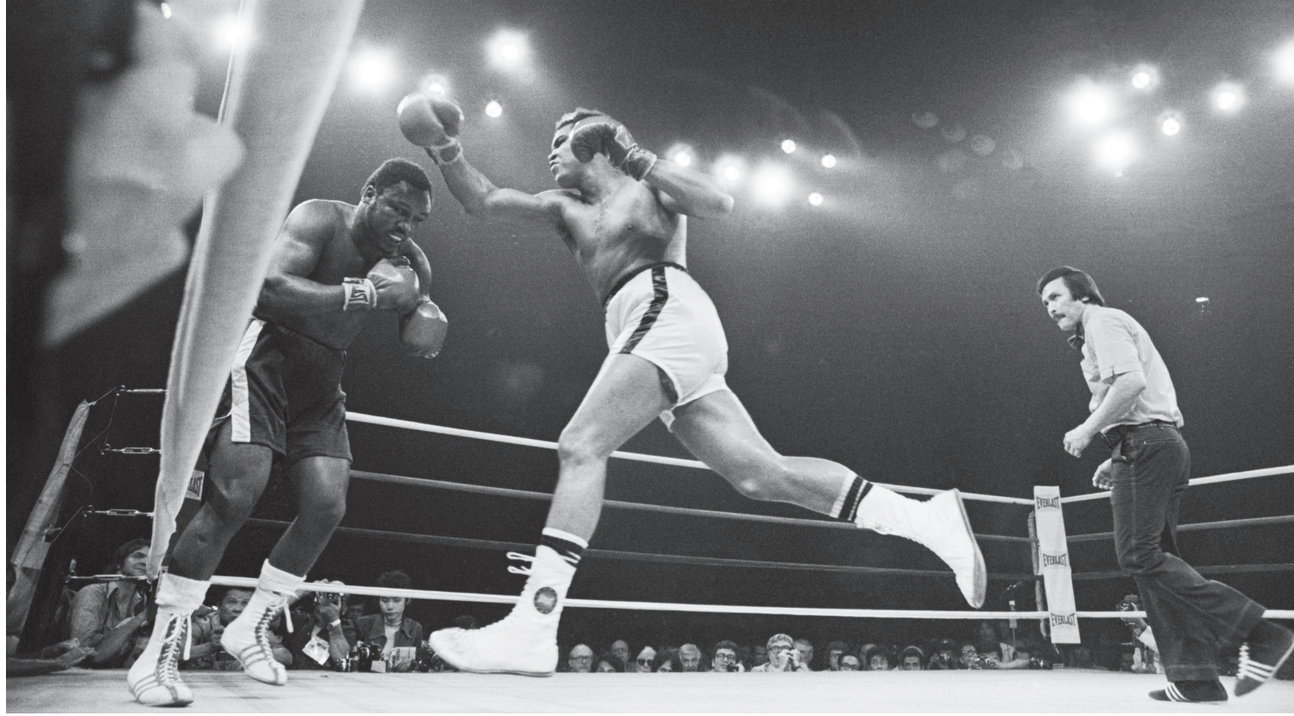
Dwight Muhammad Qawi grew up tough and lived a tough life.

It took a blizzard to bring out the soft side of him. RING

Dwight Muhammad Qawi passed away on July 25, 2025, at the age of 72.

FINISHING SHOTS

FINAL DROPS OF GREATNESS: On October 1, 1975, Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier faced off for the third time in a heavyweight showdown that will never be forgotten. Four and a half years earlier, Frazier had floored and outpointed Ali in "The Fight of the Century" to retain the heavyweight championship. However, "The Greatest" was the superior fighter in a 1974 non-title rematch and cruised to a unanimous decision triumph. Ali then regained the crown by knocking out George Foreman in a stunning upset and was a big favorite to defeat Frazier in the rubber match. While he got himself over the line in "The Thrilla in Manila," prevailing via TKO 14, Ali was taken to the depths of hell in searing heat by a rejuvenated "Smokin' Joe." Neither man was ever the same after this fight. RING



FIGHTLINE

BY DOUG FISCHER

Fights only last a matter of minutes, but fighters are connected to each other by chains that extend for decades – even centuries – into the past. Their bond is a lineage built face-to-face: A young prospect struggles with the skills of an aging veteran whose nose was once broken by a fighter now enshrined in the International Boxing Hall of Fame. In that way, muscle memory carries knowledge and boxers face a piece of everyone their opponent has fought, everyone those people fought, and so on.

This month we're linking two all-action light heavyweights of Mexican descent – **Alvaro "Yaqui" Lopez** and **David Benavidez.**

Lopez, a perennial contender during the 175-pound division's golden age of the mid-1970s to the early 1980s, was born in Zacatecas, Mexico, but grew up in Stockton, California. The two-fisted slugger came up short in four courageous bids for versions of the light heavyweight title – hotly contested 15-round decision losses to John Conteh and Victor Galindez (twice) and an epic 14th-round stoppage to Matthew Saad Muhammad in The Ring's 1980 Fight of the Year.

Lopez, who finished his career with a 61-15 (39 KOs) record, fought a Who's Who of '70s/'80s light heavyweight standouts, including Michael Spinks, Saad Muhammad (twice), Galindez, Conteh, Mike Rossman, James Scott, Jesse Burnett (four times), Mike Quarry, Andy Kendall and Lonnie Bennett. He was never in a bad fight.

Born to a Mexican father and Ecuadorian mother in Phoenix, Arizona, Benavidez (30-0, 24 KOs) burst onto the world-class scene as the youngest super middleweight titleholder ever (at age 20). He climbed to the top of the 168-pound rankings with victories over Anthony Dirrell (KO 9), Caleb Plant (UD 12) and Demetrius Andrade (TKO 6).

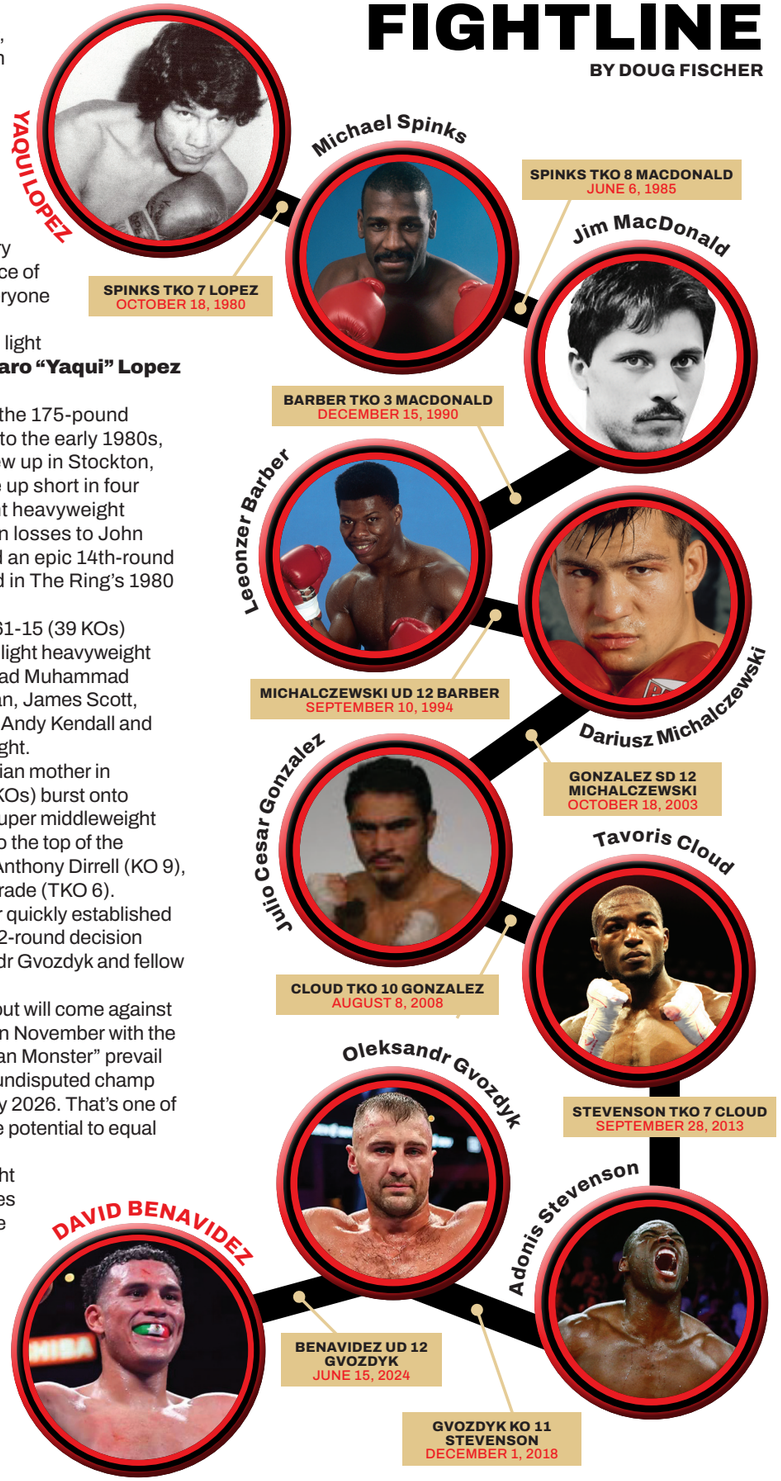
The volume-punching pressure fighter quickly established himself as a top light heavyweight with 12-round decision victories over former titleholder Oleksandr Gvozdyk and fellow contender David Morrell.

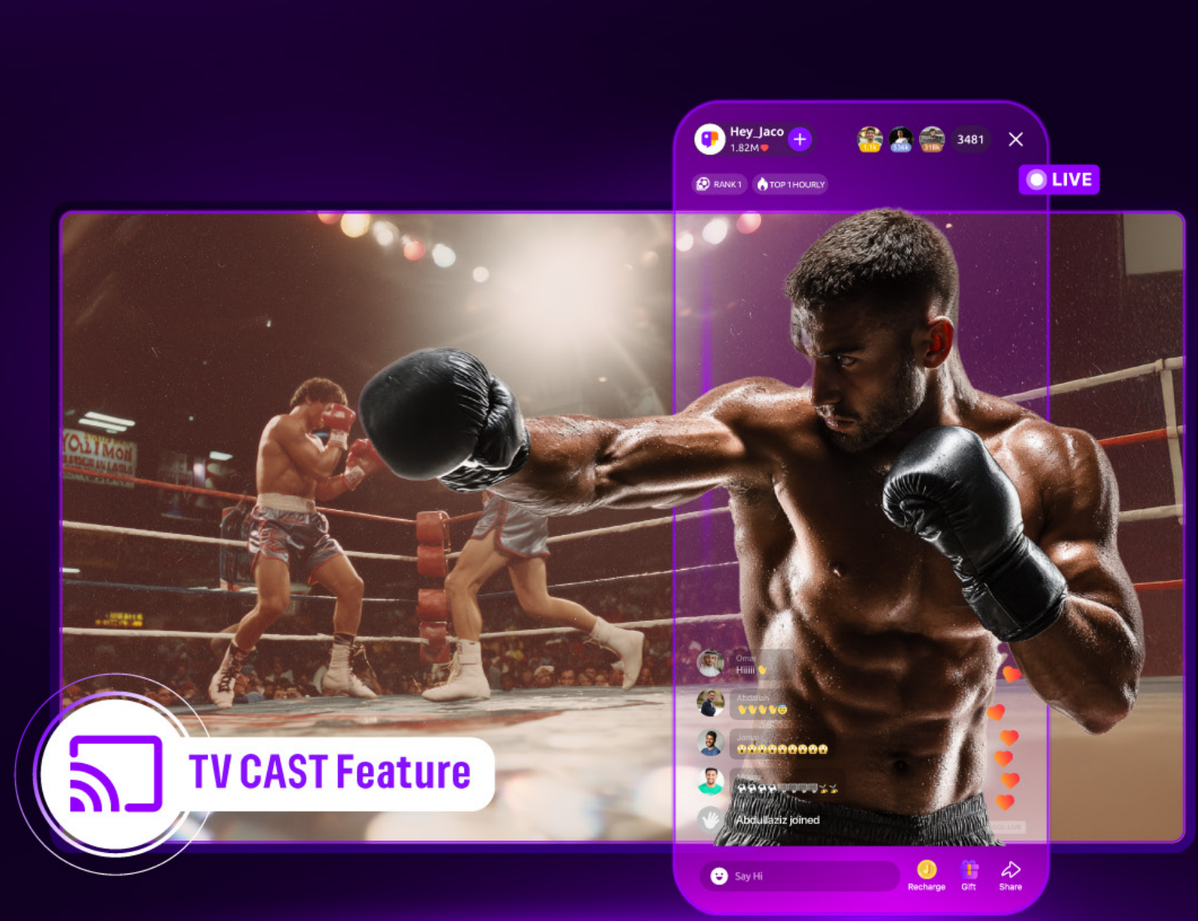
Benavidez's third light heavyweight bout will come against two-time title challenger Anthony Yarde in November with the WBC title on the line. Should the "Mexican Monster" prevail against Yarde, a showdown with former undisputed champ Artur Beterbiev could be on deck for early 2026. That's one of the few contemporary matchups with the potential to equal the fireworks of Lopez's many ring wars.

There are multiple paths linking the light heavyweight action heroes, whose primes are separated by almost 50 years, but we found this eight-boxer Fightline.

Can you find a faster route?

If so, or if you have another Fightline you'd like to submit, send it to comeoutwriting@gmail.com. And remember, some fighters can be linked on paper by jumping forward and backward in time, but to be a true lineage the fights must come in chronological order.





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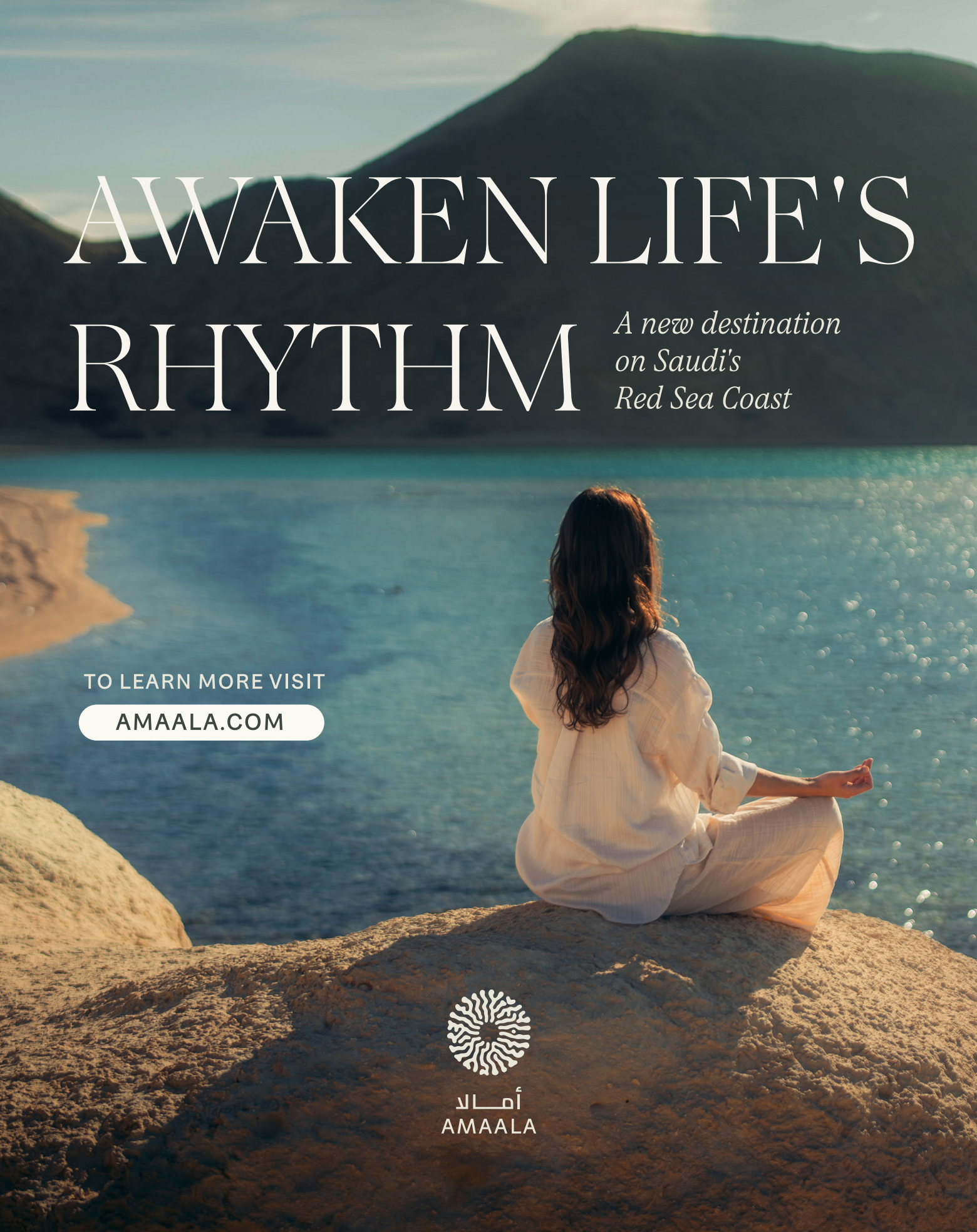
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